The anomaly of lower caste fertility in Kerala: a case study of the Vettuvans

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Except where indicated otherwise, this thesis is entirely my own work.

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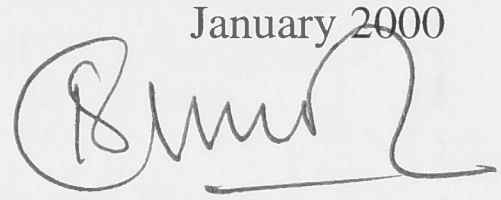

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Abstract

The anomaly of low fertility among the scheduled castes in Kerala is studied in the context of caste system changes through a detailed case study of one group, the Vettuvans. The fertility trends of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour village revealed a close link with caste-system changes. Engandiyour, in parallel with Kerala as a whole, was transformed from a traditional caste-system based to that of a non-traditional caste system based society in the twentieth century. The main forces that triggered caste-system changes in Engandiyour were land reform and Gulf migration; both took place in the 1970s. The new status of ownership of a small parcel of land, as well as the freedom from the tenancy led them to visualise possibilities not only of maintaining their newly acquired status, but also of improving further upon it. The Vettuvans being a patrilineal community, the role of sons in the family is vital. Only through sons can they achieve the goal of maintaining and improving their social and economic position, as daughters leave their parents upon marriage to live with their husbands in their homes. While Vettuvans valued sons for their security and mobility value, daughters were valued for their traditional role of home-makers. The value of sons and daughters, however, did not lead to high fertility. In fact the Vettuvans have exceptionally low fertility levels and preferences, an apparent paradox. This thesis reveals that the Vettuvans believe that in their changed circumstances, the security and mobility aspirations could be met most easily if they have children who are well educated and employed in non-traditional occupations. To educate children to an employable level and to get employment in non-traditional areas remain hugely difficult tasks, given the poor economic conditions of the Vettuvans and their employment prospects. Thus, while valuing both sons and daughters highly, the Vettuvans, for practical reasons, limit themselves to two children at most. Thus Vettuvan fertility cannot be understood except in the institutional context within which they take their childbearing decisions.

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Chapter 1

Introduction:
Objectives, Perspectives, and Methodology

1. 1 Introduction

Fertility and mortality have been falling in India and the demographic transition—from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality—is under way (See Table 3.1). Remarkable variations in fertility across states are also evident in India from various surveys (IIPS, 1995; Sample Registration System (SRS) Bulletin, various years; Manna, 1998). In addition, there are marked differences in fertility between the broad north and south cultural regimes (Satia and Saseendran, 1991; Dyson and Moore, 1983). For example, while the northern states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan[1] have total fertility rates (TFRs) higher than 4 children per woman, the southern states of Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu have TFRs lower than or close to replacement-level fertility, i.e., 2.1 children per woman (IIPS, 1995:96). Diversity, therefore, is an essential feature of Indian fertility.

Kerala state captured worldwide attention because of its unique achievements in controlling population at relatively low income levels. According to the 1992-93 National Family Health Survey (NFHS), the TFR for Kerala[2] was 2.0 children per woman, the lowest among the major Indian states[3], and well below the all-India average (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:58; IIPS, 1995:96). The economic conditions in Kerala indicate that the state's domestic product or per capita income has been lower than that of most of the Indian states and of the all-India

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[1]These four states contribute about 40 per cent of India's population. Bose (1988:xxxiii) termed these states 'BIMARU states', meaning 'sick states' in demographic terms.

[2]TFR refers to the three-year period preceding the survey 1992-93; the TFR in 1991 according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare was 1.8 (IIPS, 1995:6).

[3]Among all the 24 states and the National Capital Territory of Delhi (the erstwhile Union Territory of Delhi which recently attained statehood), Goa had the lowest in the 1992-93 NFHS.

average (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:5). This is widely seen as surprising. Broadly speaking, those nations with TFRs of 2 children per woman or close to it have higher per capita income than nations with TFRs higher than 2 children per woman (World Bank, 1993:238-239,290). In absolute GNP per capita terms, Kerala's income was less than 2 per cent of the United States' GNP per capita in 1991, while both shared a TFR of around 2.1 children per woman (World Bank, 1993:238,291). This suggests that Kerala's fertility decline has taken place at relatively low income levels, in both relative and absolute terms, going against the general pattern[4]. Despite its low income levels, Kerala has shown remarkable progress in several key areas of development such as education and literacy, infant and child mortality, and life expectancy, with levels that are substantially better than the all-India average, and other individual states (Ratcliffe, 1983:14). In 1991 these indicators for Kerala were much closer to such economically developed nations as Australia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom (World Bank, 1993:239). Thus, Kerala may be seen as a paradox where several unusual patterns of development have taken place.

As Kerala's fertility transition is considered as a victory under unfavourable economic circumstances, there has been a variety of explanations put forth by researchers. Two major strands of explanations have been advanced by researchers to explain fertility transition in Kerala: economic and social. The economic explanation is that the poor economic conditions in the state have forced large sections of labouring communities in Kerala to adopt family planning, particularly sterilisation (Mencher, 1980; Basu, 1986). The social development argument is that improvements in key social sectors such as literacy and education (Mehrotra, 1965; Krishnan, 1976; Mahadevan and Sumangala, 1987; Nag, 1989; Bhat and Rajan, 1997; Krishnakumari and Moli, 1997); land reform and other social justice policies (Ratcliffe, 1978, 1983; Franke and Chasin, 1989; Zachariah and Kurup, 1984); culture and status of women (Gulati, 1976; Devi, 1997); higher age at marriage (Gulati, 1976; Jayasree, 1989); mortality decline (Zachariah, 1983); and efficient family planning services (Zachariah and Kurup, 1984; Zachariah, 1997) have played a vital role in the fertility decline. Although not a complete explanation, others have pointed out the importance of the settlement pattern and ecological setting of Kerala in facilitating demographic transition through key developmental variables (Franke and Chasin, 1989:23; Srinivasan, 1995:246; Bhat and Rajan, 1997:48). Despite years of research, the debate on the causes of Kerala's fertility decline continues (Gopinath, 1998). One potential explanation has, however, been ignored—changes

[4] Sri Lanka may also be an exception to this generalisation.

in the caste system[5].

A discussion of caste-system changes in Kerala as a possible explanation for the fertility transition is missing in the fertility literature. It may be noted that Kerala remained one of the most traditional caste-system societies in India until about the mid-twentieth century (Aiyappan, 1965:123; Iyer, 1970:46; Franke and Chasin, 1989:75; Gopalakrishnan, 1994:292; Jeffrey, 1994:2). Under the traditional caste system[6], the lower castes were exploited both economically and socially by the upper castes. The lower castes of Kerala lived as tenants of upper castes for generations, until land reform provided them tenure of small parcels of land on which their huts stood. Although caste-system reform efforts have been in operation since the nineteenth century, a non-traditional caste system evolved only after the 1970s as a result of forces such as land reform, Gulf migration[7], and other social and economic changes in Kerala. Possibly, the most notable change that Kerala has experienced in the twentieth century has been the diminishing role of the caste system in determining people's social and economic destiny (Iyer, 1970:48-49; Ratcliffe, 1983:22). There is a correspondence between caste-system changes and the timing and pace of fertility transition in Kerala. Yet no serious attempt has been made so far to link the caste-system changes in Kerala to an understanding of the fertility transition. This thesis argues that the study of fertility change in Kerala needs to be linked to caste-system changes.

While the debate on the causes of fertility transition continues, Kerala has revealed yet another anomaly in its fertility in the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS. This is the steep fertility decline noticed among the economically, and until recently socially, disadvantaged population of Kerala. The Hindu lower castes, officially known as the scheduled castes[8], showed a TFR of 1.37 children per woman in the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS. This is lower than the TFR (1.66) recorded for the Hindus[9], and for the total population (2.0) of the state. No other state, except Assam and Bihar, demonstrated a lower fertility for its scheduled castes than the total population. In fact, the

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[5]This and similar terms are explained in the Glossary given in the appendix. The caste system which formerly prevailed in Kerala is discussed in Chapter 2.

[6]Division of Hindu society into four *varna* or *jati* based on ritual purity. A detailed discussion of the caste system is given in Chapter 2.

[7]Temporary employment migration to the oil rich Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, Yemen Arab Republic, and Jordan. Chapter 2 gives more details.

[8]Defined in Chapter 2. There were 68 scheduled castes in the 1981 Census of Kerala. To be in a scheduled caste one should follow the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist religion (Ghosh, 1997:149;154-155). In Kerala no Sikh and Buddhist scheduled castes are reported.

[9]Hindus include scheduled castes.

scheduled castes' TFR in Kerala was the lowest recorded for the scheduled castes among all the Indian states. Even Goa, which showed the lowest fertility for the total population among all the states in India in 1992-93 had a substantially higher fertility for the scheduled castes (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:58; IIPS, 1995:96; various volumes of the 1992-93 National Family Health Survey of India). Another anomaly in the scheduled-caste fertility in Kerala is the turnaround in scheduled castes' and non-scheduled castes' fertility. The 1992-93 Kerala NFHS has evinced a lower fertility for scheduled castes than for the Hindus in Kerala as a whole. However, surveys conducted before the 1990s revealed that scheduled castes fertility was then higher than that of other Hindus. Thus the scheduled-castes fertility transition is unusually rapid, even within a Keralan context.

However, in contrast to the interest demonstrated by researchers in explaining the overall fertility transition in Kerala, no study has been published on the fertility decline of Kerala's scheduled castes. Explanations offered to explain Kerala's fertility decline are inadequate to understand the anomaly in the scheduled-castes fertility. For example, if the poverty hypothesis is generalisable, why did the scheduled castes, who form the largest group of agricultural labourers[10], have a higher fertility than the rest of the Hindus in the 1960, 1970s and presumably earlier? In fact they were much poorer in the 1960s and 1970s than in the 1980s or 1990s (Ratcliffe, 1978, 1983). There is no evidence to indicate that the nutritional and health status of scheduled-caste women has deteriorated during the transition period so as to reduce their fertility in Kerala (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995).

On the other hand, if social developments are responsible for the lower fertility of the scheduled castes compared to the non-scheduled caste Hindus, why did the scheduled castes experience a much steeper fertility decline than the non-scheduled castes? In other words, why did the scheduled castes respond to social development at a much faster pace than the non-scheduled castes? In fact, the key social development indicators such as education, literacy, standard of living, and economic status of the non-scheduled castes have been much higher than those of the scheduled castes throughout the transition period (United Nations, 1975:37-38; Mencher, 1980; Bhat and Rajan, 1997:44,58-59) Obviously, the poverty and social development hypothesis has little to offer in explaining the scheduled castes' fertility transition in Kerala.

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[10]The poorest sections of Kerala society; they accounted for about 40 per cent of Kerala's population in 1981.

The premises of the present research are these anomalies in the fertility decline of the scheduled castes of Kerala. The focus, however, is on the reasons for the fertility decline of one scheduled-caste community in Kerala. The study examines the ways in which the caste-system changes, land reform, and Gulf migration affect the fertility behaviour of the scheduled castes through a process that has reshaped the social and economic mobility aspirations that determine the benefit of children. It examines the constraints that the new institutional environment, characterised by a non-traditional caste system, poses for the cost of children, using an institutional approach advanced by Greenhalgh (1988, 1990a, 1995) and McNicoll (1994). This study was carried out among the Vettuvans, a scheduled-caste community in a village in central Kerala, using the micro-demographic method developed by Caldwell (Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1982; Caldwell, Hill and Hull, 1988). The field work for this study was conducted during March - December, 1997.

1.2 Proposition and objectives

1.2.1 Proposition

This study considers social reform, land reform, and Gulf migration as three exogenous factors in Kerala that changed the traditional caste system, where ascribability dominated achievability, to a non-traditional caste system[11], where achievability dominated ascribability. In the non-traditional caste-system society it became possible for scheduled-caste families to move up the social and economic ladder. The mobility goals of the scheduled-caste families were to have a respectable social and economic status in the local community. Their mobility strategy was to educate their children to a level that enabled them to get salaried and respectable jobs. Another mobility strategy of scheduled-caste families was to adopt certain practices of the well-to-do, but not of a specific caste or religious group[12], to show their improved social and economic position in the local society. Kerala's poor industrialisation and economic development were constraints in obtaining a salaried and respectable job, irrespective of jobs reserved for the scheduled castes in the government sector. Another significant constraint was posed by the costs of raising

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[11]This does not necessarily mean a caste-free society; it only means that caste is not used in the social and economic relations in the society. In this context, land reform, Gulf migration and social change can be regarded as exogenous to the caste system.

[12]The process of lower castes adopting the practices of upper castes is called Sanskritisation by Srinivas (1966), who defined it as ' the process by which a "low" Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, "twice-born" caste' (Srinivas, 1966:6).

children, particularly educating them to an employable level. All these constraints mean longer waiting periods in obtaining employment for children; that is, in Caldwell's (1982) terms, larger and longer wealth flows from parents to children. Additional constraints posed by the changed institutional environment were first, the small areas of family land received by the scheduled castes through land reform, and second, the increasing dowry[13], that was difficult to arrange. While small areas of family land and mobility aspirations discouraged the scheduled castes from having more than one son, higher amounts of dowry and the limited mobility of daughters encouraged parents to minimise the number of daughters. However, the traditional role of daughters did not allow the desired minimum to be zero. The main mobility unit in the scheduled castes in the non-traditional caste system has been the patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal family. In such cultures sons are valued highly for their role in the very survival of the family. The fertility strategy of the family, mediated by culture, was then to adjust the number of its offspring to the lowest possible.

1.2.2 Objectives

The overall objective of the present research is to investigate the causes of fertility decline among the Vettuvans, a scheduled caste community in Kerala. The following are the study's specific objectives.

(i) To review the caste-system changes, social development and economic changes in Kerala in an historical perspective.

(ii) To review and assess fertility transition in Kerala.

(iii) To determine the fertility levels, trends, and family planning practices of the Vettuvan community in order to assess the extent of the fertility change.

(iv) To examine the role of land reform and Gulf migration in the caste-system changes in the study village and the social and economic status of the Vettuvans.

(v) To examine marriage practices, family, gender relations, and intergenerational relations among the Vettuvans in the traditional- and non-traditional caste system.

(vi) To identify security-mobility goals and strategies of the Vettuvans in the non-traditional caste system.

(vii) To examine the security-mobility costs and benefits of Vettuvan children in the non-traditional caste system.

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[13]Discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

1.3 Theoretical perspectives on fertility transition

Before addressing these specific objectives, it is worthwhile considering the most relevant theories that attempt to explain why fertility transitions take place in human populations. This has been a central question in demography. Research in the field of population has provided us with insights about fertility transitions across regions, nations, and communities. One of the important findings from the research of the twentieth century is that the world population has taken diverse pathways to lower its fertility (Cleland, 1994; Kirk, 1996:386; McNicoll, 1998:38). According to McNicoll (1998:38) 'there is no unique path of development, so no single pattern of fertility transition'. Fertility has declined under different levels of economic development, social development, political regimes, family planning efforts, mortality levels, and cultural backgrounds. For example, Bangladesh has shown that fertility decline can take place under a strong family planning programme[14], even if the economy is largely poor (Cleland, 1994:243-244). The British fertility decline, on the other hand, had taken place at relatively high income and industrialisation levels compared to the present developing world (Caldwell, 1982:326). Variations are also observed in the level, onset, and intensity of fertility transition within nation states. For example, India's two states Kerala and Uttar Pradesh have shown extreme variation in fertility, as the TFR for Kerala was 2.0 children per woman and that for Uttar Pradesh was 4.82 children per woman according to the 1992-93 NFHS (IIPS, 1995:96). Do we have a theory in demography to explain the diverse pathways of demographic transition or its absence? Regarding the theoretical developments in fertility, McNicoll pointed out:

> It is widely agreed that we do not have an adequate theory of fertility, if by theory we mean a coherent body of analysis linking a characterisation of society and economy, aggregate or local, to individual fertility decisions and outcomes, able to withstand scrutiny against the empirical record (McNicoll, 1980:441).

McNicoll's view about fertility theories in 1980 seems valid even in the 1990s. For example, Kirk (1996:361) revealed the following as the status of demographic theory in 1966: 'demography is a science short on theory, but rich in quantification'. However, Caldwell maintains that, although a unifying fertility theory, a theory that can explain fertility declines and differentials in any *time* and *place*, is yet to emerge, the efforts in that direction have been one of the reasons for the impressive progress in the discipline. In this regard, Caldwell (1997) noted in his IUSSP presidential address:

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[14]Such arguments are now questioned on the ground that there has been a substantial improvement in the overall social and economic situation of the Bangladeshis (Caldwell *et al.*, 1999).

> The unitary theory of fertility transition will have to embody both long-term underlying economic and demographic trends and ideas and ideologies, legitimization, and assistance in access to contraception. No one could seriously maintain that the nineteenth-century British, had they found themselves in circumstances similar to those in contemporary India or China—where the government and the elites insist that family limitation is a social and a moral duty and where the pill, sterilization, and abortion are approved and easily obtainable—would have delayed the onset of strict limitation of marital fertility to the late 1870s. The pursuit of the unitary theory will be intellectually rewarding, and doubtless that pursuit will itself result in further demographic change (Caldwell, 1997:810)

The following section will examine some of the important fertility theories that have been used to explain fertility changes in both contemporary and historical populations[15].

1.3.1 Classical demographic transition theory

Classical demographic transition theory, or simply 'demographic transition theory', is one of the most discussed theories in demography; as Demeny (1972) put it, 'the central preoccupation of modern demography'. Notestein is considered to be the first formulator of demographic transition theory[16], which posits a three-stage transition composed of a pre-transitional phase of high fertility and high mortality and thus slow population growth; a transitional stage of falling mortality resulting in rapid population growth; and a post-transitional stage of low fertility and mortality rates bringing a return to slow or no population growth. The causes of such transition are broad forces of modernisation such as urbanisation and industrialisation. These broad forces of modernisation alter the economics of childbearing in such a way that a large number of children becomes a disadvantage to parents as costs of child rearing rise and benefits of children lessen. The social, economic and aspirational changes brought about by urbanisation and industrialisation can be best viewed from Notestein's own words:

> The new ideal of the small family arose typically in the urban industrial society. It is impossible to be precise about the various causal factors, but apparently many were important. Urban life stripped the family of many functions in production, consumption, recreation, and education . . . In factory employment the individual stood on his own accomplishments. The new mobility of young people and the anonymity of city life reduced the pressure toward traditional behaviour exerted by the

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[15]For a review of history of the population theories, see Overbeek (1974).

[16]Although Frank Notestein is considered to be the first to propose a transition model of fertility using data from various countries in the world, similar ideas were earlier put forth by Warren Thomson in 1929, Adolphe Landry in 1934, and Carr-Saunders in 1936. See Kirk (1996) for a discussion of classical demographic transition theory.

> family and the community. In a period of rapidly developing technology new skills were needed, and opportunities for individual advancement arose. Education and a rational point of view became increasingly important. As a consequence, the cost of child-rearing grew and the possibilities for economic contributions by children declined. Falling death rates at once increased the size of the family to be supported and lowered the inducement to have many births. Women, moreover, found new independence from household obligations and new economic roles less compatible with childbearing (Notestein, 1953 quoted in Kirk, 1996:364)

Evidence from the European Fertility Project and recent fertility transition in economically less developed countries in Asia has provided an opportunity to evaluate demographic transition theory in more recent as well as historical populations. Based on these observations and other theoretical aspects, the demographic transition theory is criticised for several weaknesses. These include its giving an overstylised and incomplete account of the major determinants of demographic change; an inaccurate depiction of the historical process; inattention to class specificity of demographic change; ethnocentric assumptions about the units of demographic decision making and behaviour (Greenhalgh, 1990a:92); a unilinear view of societal change; the rational pursuit of self-interest; universal principles applying to all societies regardless of their cultural variations in values and beliefs (Hayes, 1994:5-7); and using a limited set of information to develop a general theory (Cleland and Wilson, 1987:5-6). Although demographic transition theory is known as theory, for some it is an 'idea,' a 'generalisation' or a 'framework for analysis' (Szreter, 1993). According to Teitelbaum (1975:420), 'the theory offers only partial explanation of European trends and ambiguous advice for developing countries'. This view was shared by Ratcliffe (1983) in an examination of demographic transition theory in the context of Kerala, where he indicated that demographic transition theory had failed to explain the demographic change.

However, some consider demographic transition theory to have explanatory and predictive value, probably higher than many of the later modifications and alternatives. Chesnais[17] (1992:5) considers demographic transition theory to be the only interpretative scheme that reflects a synthetic and coherent view of contemporary demographic changes. Mason (1997:448-449) was sceptical about the decadal time scale in the European Fertility Project used to test a demographic transition theory that used a centennial scale. She believed that, since the test was not fair, the allegations made against demographic transition theory using the European Fertility Project were not justifiable. Kirk (1996:383) suggests that there is no alternative theory of equal value in forecasting future populations or as a guide

[17]Chesnais (1992) also criticised many aspects of the demographic transition theory.

to empirical research. In a comprehensive review of demographic transition theory Kirk notes the present status of the theory as follows:

> The demographic transition was born a lusty infant some 50 years ago. With all its shortcomings, it remains at the centre of the demographic stage (Kirk, 1996:384).

Considering the view that demographic transition theory is largely inadequate for the purposes of description, explanation or prediction of fertility, one would expect alternative theoretical formulations. The following section briefly considers some of the post classical theoretical works.

1.3.2 Post-classical fertility transition theories

As indicated earlier, trust in the classical demographic transition theory began to fade with the findings from the European Fertility Project launched in 1963. This project was designed to test demographic transition theory with historical data from 700 provincial-level units throughout Europe. The most important finding of this project was that there was no consistent relation between the timing of the onset of fertility decline and measures of social and economic development (Knodel and van de Walle, 1979). This project, however, provided several leads to further thinking about fertility decline, particularly the role of culture in fertility change. Five major strands of post-classic attempts to theorise fertility transitions are examined in the following sections.

1.3.2.1 Ideational change theory

The European Fertility Project indicated that the levels of fertility were more closely linked to language, ethnic and geographic groups (Knodel and van de Walle, 1979; Watkins, 1986). This led some to think that birth control ideas were diffused within similar cultural regimes, without much relation to social and economic structure. Among those who advocated this view were Cleland and Wilson (1987) who proposed that ideational change is more important than structural changes for fertility transition, using illustrations from both European and Asian fertility transitions. The supportive evidence for their argument was the weak link between economic structure and fertility and a stronger link with culture and education. They argued that both education and culture determine the initial acceptability of new ideas and the quick spread of birth control ideas within many societies. Ideational change is claimed to have more force in initiating fertility transition than as an explanation of the later phase of controlled fertility. The motivation for birth control

is an aspect that is missed in this approach. Another weakness of this approach was the narrow focus on attitudes towards birth control (Greenhalgh, 1995:7,9) and the incomplete nature of its explanations (Mason, 1997:445).

1.3.2.2 Wealth-flow theory

Caldwell's theory, the wealth-flow theory, is another approach that evolved from dissatisfaction with classical transition theory (Caldwell, 1982:117-122). Unlike other theorists, Caldwell based his theory mostly on his own intensive field work conducted in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Caldwell, 1982:3-5). Wealth-flow theory is an integration of economic and social approaches to explain fertility change. According to Caldwell (1976, 1980, 1982), in pre-transitional societies the net flow of goods and services is from children to parents. Reversal of the direction of this flow—from parents to children—is the driving force behind fertility decline. The causes of such changes are the emergence of Western ideas regarding the non-patriarchal, child-centred nuclear family, which replaces the joint-family system with its vested interest in high fertility. Under the nuclear family arrangement, the locus of decision making will be the conjugal couple. Since parents want to give emotional and economic care to their children in a Western mode, family size falls because such care is expensive:

> In general, in societies of every type and stage of development, fertility behaviour is rational, and fertility is high or low as a result of economic benefit to individuals, couples, or families in its being so. Whether high or low fertility is economically rational is determined by social conditions: primarily by the direction of the intergenerational wealth flows. This flow has been from younger to older generations in all traditional societies; and it is apparently impossible (or at least, examples are unknown) for a reversal of flow—at the great divide—to occur before the family is largely nucleated both emotionally and economically. A fair degree of emotional nucleation is needed for economic nucleation; and considerable amounts of both are required before parents are free to indulge in ever greater expenditures on their children (Caldwell, 1982:152)

Caldwell's (1976, 1978, 1982) theory has been criticised on various grounds. Thadani (1978) criticised Caldwell's views about the relationship between the economic nucleation and emotional nucleation of the family, and their link to the macro and micro changes. Lack of testability is yet another weakness in the theory (Greenhalgh, 1990a:86; 1995:7). Handwerker (1986:13-14) argues that the key claims of wealth-flow theory have not been submitted to clear tests. Applicability of Caldwell's theory beyond sub-Saharan Africa is questioned by Mason (1997:444), who gives examples from Western Europe and East Asia, where she indicates that fertility did not decline according to Caldwell's theory. One of the central

assumptions in Caldwell's theory, that fertility will decline only when there is a reversal in the direction of intergenerational resources, and when children become a net economic burden, is questioned in a recent study in Côte d'Ivoire, a sub-Saharan African country where fertility remains exceptionally high (Stecklov, 1999). Furthermore, an attempt to apply wealth-flow theory in Kenya had led to the following conclusion[18].

> Fertility declines are now clearly underway in rural Kenya in the absence of the changes that are supposed to produce them according to Caldwell's theory (Thomas *et al.*, 1994:362).

Caldwell's theory has been an important theme in demographic discussions and research in the 1980s and early 1990s. It seems, however, that the theory has not developed further with new evidence and knowledge in the area of population. As Greenhalgh (1995:7) noted, 'Caldwell himself is no longer actively pursuing the wealth-flows program'. Despite all these weaknesses, Caldwell's theory has undeniably generated intellectual vigour and stimulus in the discipline.

1.3.2.3 Microeconomic theories

The economic component in the demographic transition theory, i.e., that modernisation of society changes the economics of child rearing in such a way that it becomes economically disadvantageous to parents, is believed by some to be the seed for economic theories of fertility (Cleland and Wilson, 1987:7; Kirk, 1996). The microeconomic application to fertility known as the 'Chicago school approach' or 'new household economics' or 'demand theories' has come from Becker (1960) and others (Schultz, 1969). The central argument posed by these economists is that reduced demand for children will reduce fertility, and thus result in fertility transition. Using the microeconomic theory of consumption, Becker (1960) developed an economic theory to explain fertility change. In this theory children were treated like any other consumer durables, costing time and money, but providing psychic benefits. The theory suggests that households decide on the optimal number of offspring given their costs, household income, and the households' relative preference for children and other goods:

> Children are viewed as a durable good, primarily a consumer's durable, which yields income, primarily psychic income, to parents. Fertility is determined by income, child cost, knowledge, and tastes. As increase in income and a decline in price would increase the demand for children, although it is necessary to distinguish between the

[18] See also Mahmud and Mcintosh (1980) for an analysis of Caldwell's view on the welfare of large families.

> quantity and quality of children demanded. The quality of children is directly related to the amount spent on them (Becker, 1960:231).

The microeconomic theory of Becker and others has been criticised by several scholars (Blake, 1968; Hawthorn, 1970:57-60). Blake (1968) criticised the approach, disputing that having a baby was comparable to the acquisition of a consumer durable such as an automobile.

Considering the criticisms of the microeconomic approach, Easterlin (1975,1978) modified the economic framework by incorporating sociological aspects. Easterlin's framework envisages modernisation as influencing fertility through the intervening variables of supply, demand, and costs of regulating births. It does not assume priority or dominance among different economic, socio-economic and cultural variables. According to Kirk (1996), the quality of Easterlin's synthesis induced the National Research Council's Panel on Fertility Determinants to adopt it as the basic framework for its massive study on Determinants of Fertility in Developing Countries[19].

Despite its modifications, the economic theory of Easterlin has come under criticism from scholars. According to Greenhalgh (1995:8), although Easterlin's work has broadened the scope of consumer-choice models, they still focus on the economic calculus of fertility decision making, neglecting contextual and historical forces impinging on those cost-benefit deliberations. Kirk (1996) points out the following weakness in Easterlin's model:

> The transition model has thus received a great deal of attention. But its practical application faces difficulties. The dependent variable is the number of children a woman has borne by the end of her reproductive life, and, therefore, takes a cohort, rather than a period perspective. This is useful for some purposes, but not useful for the analysis of current events. Furthermore, it assumes a fixed life cycle (i.e. parents decide at the time of their marriage what number of children they want, and adhere to this decision throughout their fecund years), and it makes no allowance for changes with time and experience. This view certainly conflicts with actual experience (Kirk, 1996:371).

A critical review of demand theories offered by Cleland and Wilson (1987:15) identified serious flaws in the economic approaches. They noted that England had all the economic traits stated in demand theories to bring about a fall in fertility for centuries before the transition began. They also suggested that evidence from the contemporary pre-transitional societies regarding value of children is less clear cut

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[19]See Bulatao and Lee (1983).

and more controversial than proposed in the microeconomic theories.

1.3.2.4 Institutional theories

Institutional determinants of fertility proposed by McNicoll (1980, 1994) and others (Greenhalgh, 1988, 1990a, 1995) form yet another strand of fertility theory. According to McNicoll (1994), the patterns of reproductive change are largely shaped by the institutional endowments each society has inherited from its past and by the continuing process of rationalisation of individual behaviour as it adjusts to realities, hopes and expectations. The institutional endowments include family and local community, family and property law, the local dimension of public administration; the stratification system and the mobility path it accommodates; and the labour market. Characterisation of any society by such features reflects its unique history. It is argued that in the long run there could be a convergence of institutional structures and individual behaviours based on the effect of expectations. McNicoll (1994) illustrated how family type and community structures can influence reproductive strategies. He argued that some combinations of institutional endowments permit a smooth path to low fertility, while other combinations impede that process (McNicoll, 1994:211). McNicoll (1998:24) pointed out that much of the breakdown of rigid stratification and gender systems occurs as new technologies and institutions open new routes of upward mobility, and pose new threats to those disinclined to respond. According to Greenhalgh (1995), McNicoll's institutional demography recognises historical contingency and societal specificity, and embraces narrative modes of explanation that can accommodate such forces as gender and power that are difficult to incorporate into standard empirical models of demographic behaviour. McNicoll's institutional approach is a bottom-up approach where the cognitive environment of individual demographic decisions will be outlined first, followed by a sketch of local institutional and cultural configurations, and finally the larger forces shaping institutional change. Greenhalgh's (1988) political economy, a variant of the institutional approach, is a top-down approach beginning with an understanding of the historically developed global forces that shape the local demographic regimes, then identifying the ways these impinge on regional, national and local institutional environments, and finally tracing their effects on individual fertility behaviour (Greenhalgh, 1990a:87). Greenhalgh's (1990a:88) explanations of fertility transitions embrace 'not only the social and economic, but also the political and cultural aspects of demographic change'.

1.3.2.5 Social mobility theories[20]

Social mobility is one of the earliest attempts to explain fertility decline; Dumont is considered a pioneer in this field. Dumont (1890, referred to in Overbeek, 1974:80) suggested in his concept of *capillarité sociale* (social capillarity) that societies which are democratic, like the France of his time, had many opportunities for their inhabitants to improve themselves. On the other hand, in many civilisations the static rigid organisational culture did not provide opportunities for improvements in people's social and economic conditions. Dumont argued that just as a column of liquid had to be thin in order to rise under the force of gravity, a family had to be smaller in size in order to rise in the social ladder:

> Any man tends . . . to climb unceasingly, as oil rises in a lamp wick . . . For one who starts at the bottom to arrive at the top, it is necessary to run fast and not to be encumbered with baggage. Thus, while an ambitious man can be served by a good marriage, . . . his own children, particularly if they are numerous, almost inevitably slow him down (Dumont 1890, quoted in Greenhalgh, 1988:630)

It is important to note in Dumont's argument that a society of democratic nature is a precondition for the social capillarity principle to operate. A rigid state with strong class or caste structure has to be transformed first to a less strong class or caste society for the social capillarity principle to apply. The Schneiders (1996) found a similar situation in their Sicily town study in Italy. They revealed that the landless labourers were prevented from lowering their fertility by inter-class relations of dominance or subordination that robbed them of the ability to visualise opportunities and to achieve smaller families.

The security and mobility desires of individuals in shaping their fertility are evident in Taussig's (1911) classic work. Taussig suggested awakened ambition of the individual as a cause for decline in birth rates. According to him, the Western European fertility decline in the nineteenth century was due to the spread of education; newspapers and books; cheap movement by railway and steamship; new modes of employment; large-scale production and the factory system. He attributed marital fertility decline to parents' desires to maintain their social and economic position, as well as to raise the social and economic position of their children.

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[20]Apart from the above views, there is much in the literature in sociology that deals with mobility and fertility linkages. An extensive review of most of the work carried out before the mid-1980s is provided by Kasarda *et al.* (1986).

Davis (1963) further elaborated on the mobility-fertility linkages in his theory of multiple responses. Davis argued that, when mortality declined and population growth increased, families tended to use every means to maximise their new opportunities and avoid relative loss of status:

> Under a prolonged drop in mortality with industrialisation, people in Northwest Europe and Japan found that their accustomed demographic behaviour was handicapping them in their effort to take advantage of the opportunities being provided by the emerging economy. They accordingly began changing their behaviour. Thus it was in a sense the rising prosperity itself, viewed from the standpoint of the individual's desire to get ahead and appear responsible, that forced a modification of his reproductive behaviour (Davis, 1963:352).

Blake (1972) shared the notion of mobility as an inevitable consequence of changes in the social stratification of a society:

> . . . once a status system based heavily on ascription (on the status of one's family rather than one's accomplishments) is overthrown (through the loss of castes, or a functioning aristocracy), individuals do not have a choice concerning whether they will participate in the new system. They must make an effort to achieve and maintain a respectable social status, or they run the risk of becoming virtual nonentities in the society (Blake, 1972:175).

The fertility-as-mobility framework developed by Greenhalgh (1988) is an institutional approach that incorporates the mobility aspirations causing fertility decline. She linked fertility with mobility aspirations to explain the fertility transition in East Asia. She proposed two realms—the security and mobility, and institutional environments—that decide the cost and benefit of children.

1.4 Conceptual scheme

The basic assumption in the conceptual scheme for the present study is that in a rigid exploitative system of social arrangement, such as the traditional caste system, it is not possible to improve lower-caste people's social and economic position. However, once the traditional caste system is changed to a non-traditional caste-system society, it is feasible to move up the ladder of social and economic mobility (Blake, 1972). In the mobility scale, the first step is to protect the social and economic status from declining (security), and then to move up (mobility) on the status ladder. This realm is the security-mobility system, which includes the social stratification structure, the family unit, and the security-mobility goals and strategies. The other realm is the institutional environment. This includes the regulative principles and the formal and informal organisations that structure the

world people live in (Greenhalgh, 1988:639; McNicoll, 1994:206). In the area of fertility, the institutional environment includes economic, educational, socio-political, and health institutions. The two realms affect fertility in many ways. In the simplified scheme, the security-mobility system determines the security and mobility benefits of children to parents and other older family members. The institutional environment defines the cost of children and the terms in which cost-benefit calculations about children are made. Culture influences how closely behaviour, including fertility, follows from cost-benefit considerations (Greenhalgh, 1988:639).

According to Greenhalgh (1988:639), in such a framework the nature and strength of the relation between the number of children born and raised, and security and mobility strategies, vary from society to society, and from time to time. Three main sources of variation postulated by Greenhalgh (1988) are: the costs and security-mobility benefits of children, the nature of contraceptive technology available, and the sensitivity of culture to the costs and benefits of children.

In the present study the two realms—security-mobility and institutional environment—will be examined in the selected scheduled-caste community in order to examine their fertility decline. Table 1.1 illustrates the links between the security-mobility system, the institutional environment, and fertility both in Kerala and in the study village. The following sections examine details of each realm in relation to the present study.

1.4.1 Security-mobility system

1.4.1.1 Social stratification

In the present research social stratification is characterised by the non-traditional caste-system society, where individual or family merit decides a family's or its members' social and economic status in the local community. In the early years of the twentieth century, Kerala society was stratified on the basis of the caste-system principles which did not permit social or economic mobility for the scheduled castes. However, caste-system changes cleared the path for social and economic mobility of the scheduled castes. Thus, as Davis (1963) noted, a society that allows every community to progress socially and economically is a prerequisite for creating social and economic aspirations of lower socio-economic classes.

1.4.1.2 The security-mobility unit

In the traditional caste system of Kerala, the landlords had tremendous influence on the family decisions of scheduled-caste tenants[21]. For example, the tenant family head had to obey the landlord for most of the important matters such as marriage of children, education, and work participation. This was primarily due to the economic dependence of the scheduled castes on the upper castes. In the non-traditional caste system, however, the scheduled-caste families became socially and economically independent. That is, the family could take decisions for its members, set their goals for further development and adopt appropriate strategies to achieve their goals.

1.4.1.3 Security-mobility goals

In the non-traditional caste system of Kerala, the scheduled castes are likely to have a strong desire to maintain and improve social and economic status. It is possible that the scheduled castes will adopt all available means to maintain and improve their social and economic position. The first priority, however, would be to maintain the newly acquired ownership of land and social status entailed by the land reform. That means they will attempt not to become tenants and a socially subordinate group again. Once security is ensured, they will then try to improve their social and economic position, their mobility. Thus, security and mobility are considered as part of a continuum in the goal hierarchy.

1.4.1.4 Security-mobility strategies

The strategies designed to maintain the already achieved social and economic status are termed security strategies, and those aimed at enhancing social and economic status are called mobility strategies (Greenhalgh, 1988:647). In the non-traditional caste system, the best way for the scheduled castes to achieve security and mobility goals would be by educating their children to an employable level. The strategy of the scheduled castes would also involve adopting some of the practices of the economically and socially well-to-do in order to show their improved social and economic status.

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[21]See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of the influence of the upper castes on the lower castes' family formation and timing of marriage.

1.4.2 Institutional environment

While the security-mobility system defines the security and mobility benefits of children, the institutional environment determines the costs of children and the terms in which cost-benefit calculations about children are made (Greenhalgh, 1988:639). The institutional environment relevant in Kerala and the study village includes the economy, contraceptive methods and their availability, and the health situation. The key elements of this are summarised below.

1.4.2.1 Economy

Remittances from migrants working in the Gulf countries have led to an economic boom which in turn has provided opportunities for economic progress, even for those who could not participate directly in the migration process, such as the scheduled castes. With the remittances from the Gulf, it has become possible for the scheduled castes to change their occupations to more skills-based occupations needed in the village. The remittances from the Gulf have also made it possible for the scheduled castes to spend money on the education of their children and on improving their living conditions.

1.4.2.2 Family planning

The availability and nature of contraceptive methods influence the number of children born, apart from the cost-benefit considerations. The national family planning programme, operating through government outlets such as Primary Health Centres[22] and sub-Centres, and the networks of private medical institutions in the state provide contraceptive services on a voluntary basis.

1.4.2.3 Health situation

If the health situation of a population is improved, relatively low fertility is sufficient to obtain the desired number of children. The health situation includes the level of infant and child mortality, and maternal health. The health situation depends on the availability of medical care, nutritional status, and the overall economic situation that determines the standard of living.

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[22]The network of government-run health units in the rural areas, set up in India after 1951 on the recommendations of the 1946 Bhore Committee (Srinivasan, 1995:318).

Table 1.1: Links between the security-mobility system, the institutional environment, and fertility in the non-traditional caste-system in Kerala and the study village

Features of security-mobility system and institutional environment	Condition of the lower castes in Kerala and the village	Implications for security, mobility, and fertility
Security-mobility system		
Caste-system changed to a non-traditional caste system	Open to mobility	No caste restrictions to mobility
	Scheduled castes become working class	Strong incentive to climb the ladder of success; desire to maintain and improve social and economic position
	Caste identity not used to discriminate or promote social interactions in the society	
Security-mobility unit	Patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal family	Family is responsible for meeting mobility goals; sons are central and long-term family members, thus essential to fulfilment of family goals
Security-mobility goals	Desire to acquire social and economic status in the society	Maintain the newly acquired social and economic status; families strive to get salaried and respectable job
Security-mobility strategies	Education Non-traditional occupation	Sons are key resources in mobility strategies; perceived high benefits from sons

Table 1.1 (continued)

Features of security-mobility system and institutional environment	Conditions in Kerala and village	Implications for security, mobility, and fertility
Institutional environment		
Economy	Remittance-based economy, economic boom through remittances, labour demand, food production very low, high demand for land for housing	Opportunities for economic progress, use of cost-benefit calculations
Educational system	Shift to fee-paying English-medium schools, government schools free	Direct and indirect educational costs high
Socio-political institutional intermediaries between government and family	Absent	Free to pursue mobility goals and to adjust strategies to environmental opportunities and constraints
Health conditions	Improvements in health status; infant and child mortality very low	Relatively low fertility necessary to obtain desired number of children
Contraceptive technology	Modern permanent methods readily available	Fertility more likely to be close to that needed for mobility goals

Note: adapted from Greenhalgh, 1988:640-41.

1.5 Methodology

The institutional approach requires detailed understanding of the institutional arrangements of the population in question. This involves intensive and time-consuming research. Inevitably, therefore, such research can be applied only to relatively small populations. This section outlines the methodology used in this thesis.

1.5.1 Kerala

Since selection of Kerala was predetermined, this paragraph gives only some basic information. Kerala's social, economic and demographic aspects are discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. Kerala state is located on the south-west coast of India; in 1991 it had 38,863 square kilometres of land and 29.1 million people[23]. It represents 3.4 per cent of the population and 1.27 per cent of the land area of India. Kerala has 1,384 villages distributed in 14 administrative districts. About 80 per cent of Kerala's population live in rural areas (Director of Census Operations, 1991:5). At the time of India's independence in 1947, Kerala state, as we officially know it today, did not exist. It consisted of three administrative units: two princely states, Travancore and Cochin located in the south, and Malabar in the north. Malabar was under the direct administration of the British Madras Presidency[24]. On 1 July 1949 the two princely states were merged to form the state of Travancore-Cochin. The present state of Kerala came into being on 1 November 1956 under the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 (Department of Public Relations, 1976:124).

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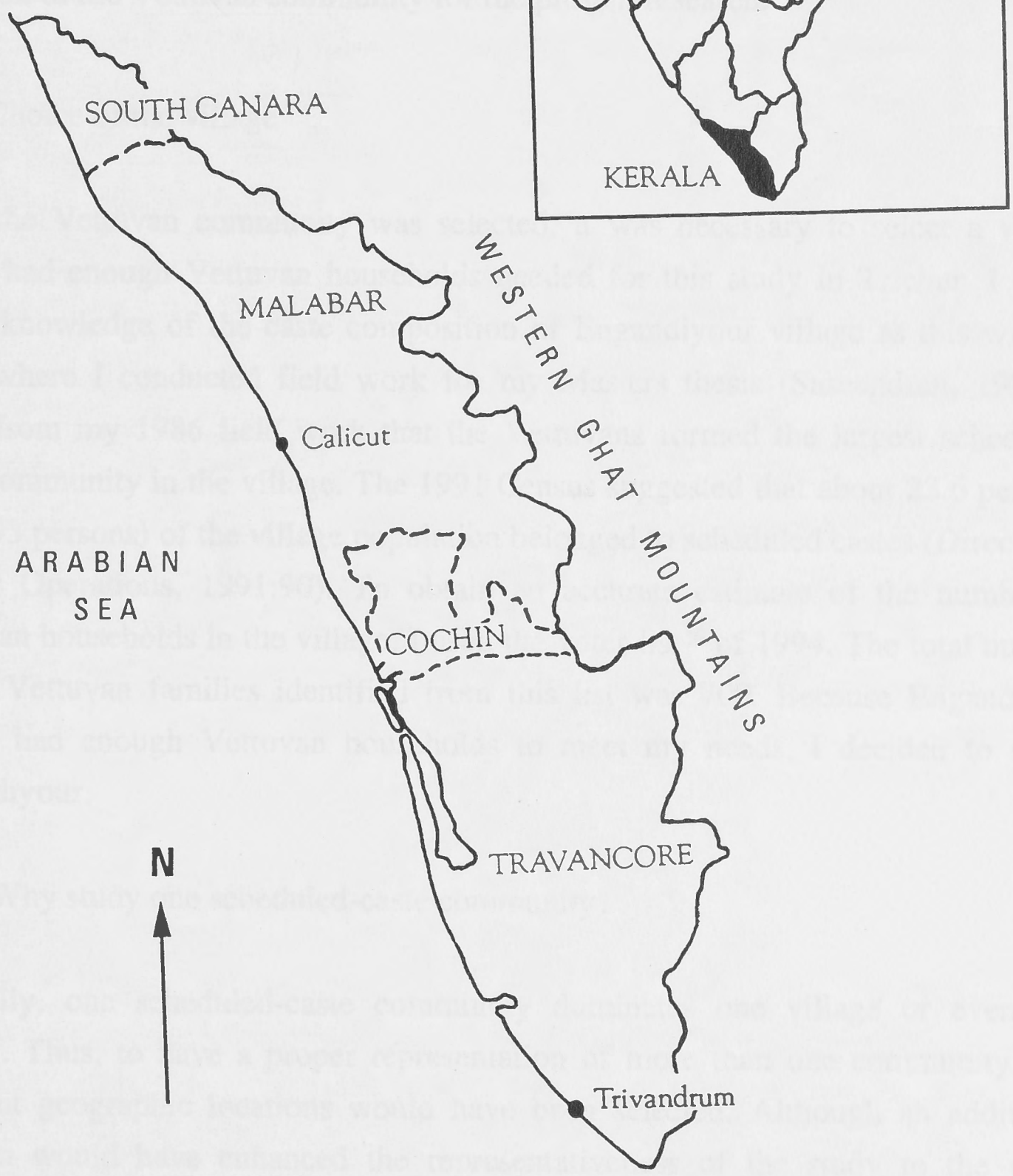
[23]Demographic details of Kerala are given in Chapter 3.

[24]When Malabar was first annexed by the British, it was first placed under Bombay Presidency (Baden-Powell, 1892:178).

KERALA

Map showing Divisions Referred to In thesis



Source: Franke and Chasin (1989).

1.5.2 Choice of the scheduled-caste community

As a large number[25] of castes make up the scheduled castes of Kerala, it was important to select a community which had a fertility decline. The Vettuvans are a scheduled-caste community in central Kerala, where I planned to conduct my field work. But first I had to find enough evidence to prove that fertility among the Vettuvans had indeed declined. Data on fertility from various Primary Health Centres (PHCs) in Trichur district and my discussion with field staff from the Sub-Centres convinced me that fertility had declined among the Vettuvans of Trichur district. Besides, I had a better understanding of the Vettuvan community than any other scheduled-caste community in Kerala because they are found mostly in the Trichur district of Kerala from which I come. All these factors contributed to the selection of the Vettuvan community for the present research.

1.5.3 Choice of the village

Once the Vettuvan community was selected, it was necessary to select a village which had enough Vettuvan households needed for this study in Trichur. I had a sound knowledge of the caste composition of Engandiyour village as this was the place where I conducted field work for my Masters thesis (Saseendran, 1986). I knew from my 1986 field work that the Vettuvans formed the largest scheduled-caste community in the village. The 1991 Census suggested that about 23.6 per cent (or 4893 persons) of the village population belonged to scheduled castes (Director of Census Operations, 1991:90). To obtain an accurate estimate of the number of Vettuvan households in the village, I used the voter list[26] of 1994. The total number of the Vettuvan families identified from this list was 700. Because Engandiyour village had enough Vettuvan households to meet my needs, I decided to select Engandiyour.

1.5.4 Why study one scheduled-caste community?

Typically, one scheduled-caste community dominates one village or even one *taluk*[27]. Thus, to have a proper representation of more than one community, two different geographic locations would have been selected. Although an additional location would have enhanced the representativeness of the study to the wider

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[25]In 1981 there were 68 scheduled castes in India. A list of scheduled castes is given in Appendix-3.

[26]List used for election purposes.

[27]A *taluk* (revenue division) on an average has 5-10 villages in its jurisdiction.

community of scheduled castes, that would have been difficult to achieve considering the time and money needed. Furthermore, this research did not aim to represent the entire scheduled-castes community of Kerala; rather it aimed to study fertility change of a scheduled-caste community in the hope that such a study would throw light on the processes that led to the fertility decline of the scheduled castes.

1.5.5 Selection of Vettuvan households

As indicated earlier, the Vettuvan households were identified using the 1994 voter list, which contained all the households in the village. Since voter lists are generally prepared with consultation of all political parties the possibility of any households being missing from the list is very small. Therefore, a voter list can be considered a complete list of households in the village. From this voter list, all the Vettuvan households were identified with the help of a local political leader. Since the Vettuvans have some typical family names, it was easy to identify their families. My familiarity with the Vettuvan family names enabled me to verify the Vettuvan households identified by the local leader.

However, using the 1994 voter list did pose some problems. That is, households that had been formed (mostly through family partition) since 1994 were not included in the voter list. Further enquiries revealed that in Engandiyour, household partitions had been few in the 1990s. For example, the total increase in the number of households between 1991 and 1995-96 in the whole village was about 7 per cent (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996; Director of Census Operations, 1991). This suggests that between 1994 and 1997, the increase in the number of Vettuvan households may not be significant enough to change the number of households selected using the voter list of 1994. That is, the number of Vettuvan households in the 1994 voter list may not be significantly different from that of the number of households which existed during my study in 1997.

The voter list provided information on name, age, sex, and family name of each member of the households above 18 years of age. The voter list was classified according to wards[28] of the village. This enabled me to group the Vettuvan households for the ten wards, which made data collection easily manageable.

From the list of all the Vettuvan households, which totalled 700, 350 households were selected on a systematic random sample basis, without replacement; that is

[28]Administrative divisions. Details are given in Chapter 5.

every second household was selected for the study. A non-replacement strategy was adopted because then the interviewers would not have to take decisions in the field as to whether to include or exclude a particular household when the listed household could not be interviewed for some reason.

1.5.6 Data needed for the study

Since this study is about understanding fertility decline in a selected scheduled-caste community using an institutional approach, detailed information was necessary on both macro and micro situations. The macro-level data needed included the state-level information on caste-system reforms, land reform, Gulf migration and other migrations, economic change and social development in general. The micro-level data needed included data on the village, families, and couples. Village data needed were data on the social, political and economic histories. Family-level data needed included family types, intergenerational relations, and data on gender and sex roles. Couple-level data needed in this study were mainly data on fertility, family planning, and values related to children.

1.5.7 Choice of the method

In demographic research, anthropological methods of data collection have become popular in the recent decades (Caldwell, Hill and Hull, 1988; Greenhalgh, 1989, 1990a:88; Obermeyer, 1997:813). The method used in demographic research is generally guided by what information one is seeking, and the theoretical approach being adopted. Sometimes a combination of methods is used as each method offers different types of information that complement each other. The two methods commonly used in demographic research are qualitative methods, largely adopted from anthropology[29], and quantitative methods based on surveys. Steckler *et al.* (1992:1) have pointed out that both qualitative and quantitative methods have weaknesses which can be compensated for by the strengths of the other. Regarding the multiple use of methods in understanding demographic processes Fricke (1997) noted:

> I argue, however, that placing demographic processes within a cultural matrix calls for a special kind of research effort, one that combines within the same project the multiple methods suitable for gathering different kinds of data and one that places all analytic strategies within more encompassing models of cultural and social action (Fricke, 1997:381)

[29]See Knodel (1997) for a critical examination of anthropological and qualitative methods in demography.

The present study has adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies—the micro approach developed by Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988:9-43) during their field work in Karnataka. The micro-approach included use of available data sets; mapping and census of village; participant observation; unstructured interviews; surveys. In addition the micro-approach generated hypotheses during the project and collected data on those items.

The micro-approach was considered appropriate for this project because of the nature of the data needed. For example, to collect data on fertility, it was more appropriate to use quantitative methods. A census of households and structured interviews of selected respondents were adopted in this study as part of the quantitative methods. To understand the underlying causes of observed fertility, more insight into the social and economic relationships between communities in the past and present was needed. Consequently, anthropological methods of field work were adopted, involving techniques such as general observation, informal conversation, in-depth interviews, and focus-group discussions.

1.5.8 Rapport with the community

The success of any field work depends on how well the researcher is accepted by the community under study. My top priority, therefore, was to gain maximum co-operation from the Vettuvan community. This was a challenge in Engandiyour village where the Vettuvan households were spread all over the village, except for a few colonies that have emerged recently. Each family needed to be told about my intention, and support had to be sought on an individual household basis; this was time-consuming. To overcome this problem I approached a few eminent members of the Vettuvan community, the gatekeepers, and explained the project to them in detail. They were happy that their community was a topic of interest in overseas universities. The community has group gatherings once in a while to discuss various aspects of their social life, and they suggested to me that I could meet the group during one such occasion and explain the project to the group. These gatherings involved a group of Vettuvans from various *thara*, parts of the village, and at least one man from each family was expected to attend. I used such gatherings to communicate with members of the Vettuvan community about my study and the support I needed from their families.

I also benefited from the local political leaders and the village *Panchayath* (council) president, who showed interest in spreading information on the project during her visits to various wards in the village. When I advertised investigator positions in the local newspaper, many scheduled-caste families became aware of this project. Two of my investigators were from the Vettuvan community, which also helped my entry into the community. Over and above this, some villagers knew me and my family very well; those who knew me well communicated with those who did not. This also made entry into the community easier. By the time I began my interviews, almost everyone from the Vettuvan community knew that someone would visit their house and ask questions about various aspects of their life. This made my entry to each household familiar rather than strange. Despite all these efforts, questions were invariably asked. These included: 'Why do you want to know all this?' 'What benefits are we going to get from this?'. I managed to win their confidence by repeating that the work was an academic exercise and had nothing to do with government policies or programmes. Since education and academic pursuits are valued highly in the village and among the Vettuvans, I always obtained the necessary co-operation during my field work.

1.5.9 Quantitative data collection

Quantitative data for the present study were collected primarily through surveys. Structured interview schedules were administered to the respondents by face-to-face interviews. Details of these interviews are discussed in the following sections.

1.5.9.1 Translation, pre-testing and formatting

Before the field operations, interview schedules were prepared in English. Each interview schedule was then translated into the local language, Malayalam. The village dialect was used instead of the written language; the Malayalam translations were done by me as I had enough knowledge of the local language. It should be mentioned here that Vettuvans speak a dialect of Malayalam which is slightly different from the dialect used by other communities in the village, and is considered the language of the poor and illiterate by the villagers. The dialect used in the pre-testing of questionnaires was the dialect used by the Vettuvans, but it emerged during the pre-testing interviews that the Vettuvans did not like other people using their dialect to interview them; therefore, the language was modified to a more standard dialect. For pre-testing, 10 interviews each from different questionnaires were conducted in the village. Pre-testing provided a few other

recommendations for change in the structure of the questionnaire and questions. Since pre-testing was conducted without any time lag between interviews, lessons could not be learned about real interviews where there was a time lag. For example, in the real interviews, household interviews were done first, couple interviews were done after almost a month, and other interviews still later. We had to change our strategy on timing of interviews, as many people did not find it interesting to answer questions when we made several visits.

After the suggestions from the pre-testing were incorporated, the schedules were formatted using computer software which uses the Malayalam script. Each questionnaire had a title which very clearly indicated the name of the Australian National University, so that people were able to read it and convince themselves that it was genuinely an academic study. This had significant bearing on the entire field operation. I had given special attention to giving sufficient space to write answers, and the entire schedule had a professional look, which again enhanced the seriousness of the whole data collection business, not only from the point of view of respondents but also for those who helped me to collect data.

1.5.9.2 Selection, training, and supervision of data collection

To employ the best investigators from and around the village, an advertisement was placed in the local newspaper and local libraries. Six investigators were selected for this study, of whom four were women. All investigators selected for this study had some university education and a few years of experience in marketing with private lending institutions and with the health and family welfare programme.

After selection, each investigator was given training which involved a detailed session on the project. Emphasis was placed on ensuring the investigators clearly understood each question in the interview schedules, and how they would ask these in the field. Once they became familiar with questions in the interview schedules and techniques of interviewing, all the investigators were asked to administer them in their neighbourhood (not a part of pre-testing). This was to prove that they understood all the questions fully; they could seek further clarifications, if needed.

In the middle of my field work, one investigator left when he obtained a job and another one left for personal reasons; this forced me to select two more investigators in the middle of the survey. After initial training they joined the other investigators to receive first-hand training. After a week of training they became part of the

investigator team, and the entire team then remained until the end of the data collection.

The strategy of data collection was that each investigator would go to a predetermined ward, and to the selected number of households scheduled for each day. This enabled me to supervise each investigator's work efficiently. Supervision of work involved checking interview schedules on the spot for completion, correctness and thoroughness.

1.5.9.3 Data collection through interview schedules

Vettuvan Household Survey

Vettuvan Household Survey interviews were the first structured interviews conducted with the selected households of the Vettuvan community. The head of the household or a responsible adult member[30] of the household was entitled to be a respondent in this interview. Each interview, excluding the introduction, lasted on average 40 minutes. The purpose of this interview was to collect basic information from each household. These include details of each member of the household, house type, amenities in the house, possessions in the household, land ownership, animal husbandry, living standards, inter-caste interactions, and division of work in the household. Because of non-co-operation, changes of address, and temporary absence, 10 households could not be contacted from the total number of 350 households selected. Thus, the total number of households interviewed in this study was 340. An English version of the household interview scheduled is given in Appendix-1 'Survey Instruments'.

The household interviews were completed in March 1997. This one-month-long household survey laid the foundations for subsequent work among the Vettuvans. We used Vettuvan Household Surveys to inform each household about the project, what we would need from them, and how often we would meet them for this purpose.

[30]A person who can provide the information needed in the Household Interview Schedule. The investigator was to decide the ability of the respondent in the field according to the guidelines provided to him or her.

Vettuvan Husband's Survey, and Vettuvan Wife's Survey

The content of both Vettuvan Wife's and Vettuvan Husband's Surveys was the same, except for a section on birth history which targeted women only. The objective of this interview was to collect detailed information about a birth history, various aspects of preference for number and sex of children, opinions about the usefulness of male and female children, changes in the usefulness of male and female children, family planning use, and old-age-security concerns. The English version of the couple interview schedule is given in Appendix-1 'Survey Instruments'.

From the Household Survey, all couples in which the wives were in the age group 15-49 years were selected for the Wife's and Husband's Surveys. There was a total number of 350 currently married couples. My purpose was to interview all of them; however, I was able to interview only 308 wives and 269 husbands. Some men and women could not be interviewed because some women had left their husband's house in order to give birth in their natal homes in other villages, some men were away for work, and some did not want to be part of the survey. The Vettuvan Wife's and Vettuvan Husband's Surveys were planned initially as the first set of interviews after the Household Survey. But where we could not interview either husband or wife during our visit, we conducted the elderly-interviews as a part of the Elderly Vettuvan Survey, of those aged 60 years and over. Thus, after the Household Survey, we could not follow a strict protocol in terms of which survey should be done first, which second and so on. The Vettuvan Wife's interview schedules were administered by women and the husbands' interviews by men; each interview lasted on average 60 minutes. All interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes. To avoid imposing on respondents' time, we avoided contacting women for wives' interviews during busy hours. Similarly to avoid inconvenience, we arranged appointments with those men who regularly went to work. Since we already had good rapport with the households, it was rather easy to start interviews without much questioning of their purpose.

Survey of School-Going Children

The purpose of this interview was to collect information about the education of the child, expenditure on education, perceptions about the use of education, and child labour. The English version of the interview schedule is given in Appendix-1 'Survey Instruments'. All children currently studying in a school or college were identified from the Household Survey. There was a total of 315 children attending

an educational institution at the time of the Vettuvan Household Survey; of these, I was able to interview parents or guardians of 254 children. Some parents or guardians could not be interviewed because, since there was a 4-5 months gap between the Household Survey and the Survey of School-Going Children, some children had completed their education[31]. In some households more than one child was at school and parents or guardians were not willing to provide information about all children. We had planned to interview either the mother or the father. Wherever we could not find parents, or where children were living with their relatives, the children's guardian or a responsible family member was interviewed.

Elderly Vettuvan Survey

The purpose of this interview was to collect information about economic activities, support from children, and living arrangements of the elderly Vettuvans. The interview schedule is given in Appendix-1 'Survey Instruments'. There were 163 persons aged 60 years and above identified for this survey from the Household Survey. Of these 163 elderly we interviewed 138. Some were too sick to be interviewed; some were not available; and some, who had been alive at the time of the Household Survey, had died before the Elderly Vettuvan Survey.

Table 1.2: Sample size in each type of survey, Engandiyour, 1997-98.

Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997	Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997	Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997	Survey of School-Going Children, 1997	Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997
340	269	303	254	138

1.5.10 Qualitative data collection

Bogue (1993b) suggests the following as one of the most effective situations for the use of qualitative methods:

> Study of conditions, situations, forces, and influences that usually are not overtly visible, but are expressed latently as 'power,' 'domination,' 'discrimination,' 'exploitation,' 'dependency,' 'abuse,' 'harassment,' 'alienation,' 'mental health,' 'altruism,' 'assimilation' and similar terms for which objective indicators are few and/or unknown (Bogue, 1993b:24-5).

[31]Academic year ends in April-May in Kerala.

Qualitative data were collected in this study in order to examine the caste system, mobility aspirations, the effect of land reform and Gulf migration on inter-caste behaviour, and the role of children in the mobility-security aspirations of the family. The purpose of the qualitative data was to generate rich, detailed, valid process data that would leave the study participants' perspectives intact (Steckler *et al.*, 1992:1). The following are the methods used for collecting qualitative data in the present study.

1.5.10.1 Informal conversations

In my field work informal conversations proved a significant source of information in understanding the underlying causes of fertility change. During the course of field work I conducted over 50 individual or group conversations; of these 23 conversations were recorded for this study. The participants in these conversations included the village *Panchayath* members, staff from the Village *Panchayath* office, local political leaders, and residents of the village from various religious and caste groups. Informal conversations in the present research were often unplanned. These conversations took place in work places, the market, banks, schools, at social functions and festivals. The location of the place was very important in selecting a particular topic for conversation. For example, if the conversation was at a marriage function, the conversations were mostly focused on such issues as the marriage expenses, marriage customs, age at marriage, and employment and marriage. If the conversations were at a school and with a teacher, then it could be about English-medium private schools, transport to schools, school uniforms, expenses in education, difficulties in educating children, employment, or comparison of the present system with the past. The informal conversations also depended on the characteristics of the person. These included occupation, interest, and social position.

Informal conversations that I had in the village sometimes involved more than one person. Although I had no direct control of the topics of conversation, many aspects that were of interest to the present research were discussed. In the informal conversations, an obvious issue was recording the conversations. On no occasion could I write down the details of conversation immediately. Often it was done late in the day when I completed my diary. One of the important objectives of these conversations was to test certain views I had about particular issues.

1.5.10.2 In-depth interviews

Using an interview guide (a list of topics to be discussed), I interviewed 12 individuals in this study. The respondents were Vettuvans (males, females), Nairs (males), and Ezava (males). The purpose of these interviews was to obtain details about family relationships, old-age-security concerns, inter-caste relationships, mobility aspirations, fertility motivations, and the value of children. Each interview took on average two hours. Interviews were done alone and often outside the person's residence. I jotted down main points during the interviews and later expanded on them.

1.5.10.3 Focus-group discussions

I organised four focus groups of women to obtain their views on expectations from children, marriage, inter-caste relationships, and their mobility aspirations. The focus groups were organised in the Sub-Primary Health Centres[32] (Sub-PHC) of the village. The average number of respondents was 10-12 in each group. Their ages varied between 24 and 50 years, and they were from around the sub-centre locality. The discussions were recorded on tape.

1.5.10.4 General observations

Observation notes were a very important source of data in the present research. Inter-caste interactions and behavioural aspects were some of the key areas where the observation technique was most useful: for example, how members of the Vettuvan community were treated by other caste groups; the level of respect an educated Vettuvan was given compared to an uneducated Vettuvan in the village; how Vettuvan children were dressed compared to children from other communities; how marriage functions were celebrated; and how Vettuvan children were treated by the family while sick compared to children from other communities.

1.5.11 Secondary data sources

The major secondary data used in this study are various census reports, the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), records from the Primary Health Centre (PHC), records from the village *Panchayath*, and other published work.

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[32]A level lower than PHC.

The National Family Health Survey[33] (NFHS) is a national survey conducted in the 24 states of India and the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The NFHS in Kerala was conducted in October 1992 and February 1993, covering all 14 districts with a representative sample of 4,332 ever-married women aged 13-49 from 4,387 households (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995).

Various census reports have been used in this research to obtain data on scheduled castes and their characteristics, such as education and occupation. District Census Handbooks were used to obtain details of the population and other details on the village. To obtain historical accounts of Kerala's caste system, caste-system reforms, land reforms, pre-Independence administration, various books and documents were used. These include Gazetteers, Kerala Bhasha Institute Publications, and history books on Kerala.

I have used Primary Health Centre (PHC) records on fertility, immunisation, and contraceptive use for the year 1995-96. The village *Panchayath* report based on the village survey in 1996 was also used in this research to obtain more details about the village and to make comparisons with my survey data.

1.5.12 Quality of data

Age reporting is often an issue in demographic surveys. Age reporting can be influenced by factors such as ignorance, culture, fear, or cut-off dates. In the present study, adequate care was taken in both the training and data collection stages to obtain accurate age data. Initially 14 March, the Malayalam New Year, was proposed as the cut-off date for a completed year; this had to be changed after a few interviews, because respondents were more familiar with the Christian than the Hindu calendar in referring to their ages. Unfortunately pre-testing could not identify this problem. To verify the age reported by respondents, we checked the ages with the voter list and the *ration* cards[34] which bear the name, age, and relationship with the head of household of every member. Since we had interviews designed for husbands, wives, school-going children, and elderly persons, we cross-

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[33]This project was funded by USAID, New Delhi. The International Institute for Population Sciences, Bombay provided co-ordination and guidance (IIPS, 1995). The second phase of NFHS is presently in operation.

[34]This card is supplied by the Civil Supplies Department of Kerala state: it shows the eligibility of the family for concessions to buy rice, oil, sugar, and kerosene. It is a document required for applying for passports, fee concessions in colleges, employment opportunities, unemployment benefits and many other legal purposes. Therefore, every household member, including the newly born, is added as soon as possible as the entitlement for groceries will increase.

checked and corrected ages wherever we found discrepancies with the age data in the household schedule. We corrected the household age data on the assumption that the age data of wives, husbands and their children would be more accurate when they reported their own ages, rather than the head of the household reporting other individuals' ages, particularly those of daughters-in-law. Despite all these efforts Myers' index (United Nations, 1955) showed a digit preference (22 and 20 for males and females, respectively). Age heaping was found in ages ending in 0 and 5, and was particularly evident in the older age groups. This pattern in age reporting is also reported in the Kerala NFHS (PRC, Thiruvanandapuram and IIPS, 1995:213). Age reporting was complete in this survey. 'Data quality Tables' are given in Appendix-2.

In this research, I made efforts to ensure that the data quality was not influenced by external factors. These included making an appointment; arranging a quiet place to conduct the interview; arranging some tea for refreshment; recording and noting points; and ensuring confidentiality about the discussion.

1.5.13 Analysis of data

1.5.13.1 Quantitative data

The first step in the analysis of quantitative data was to code the open-ended answers. In order to develop a code book all the answers to open-ended questions were noted down on a separate sheet. These answers were then coded, taking into account the similarity of answers and the objectives of the study. The coded answers were then transferred into the SPSS programme directly.

Quantitative data were analysed using demographic methods and survey data analysis methods. While demographic methods include cohort-wise analysis of parities, and calculation of rates and ratios, the survey data analysis methods adopted in this study were appropriate cross-tabulations.

1.5.13.2 Qualitative data

In general, there are no set procedures for the analysis of qualitative data. This view is very clear from the observations made by Patton (1990):

> [In analysing and interpreting qualitative data] there are no formulas for determining significance. There are no ways of perfectly replicating the researcher's analytical thought processes. There are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity. In short, there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study.
>
> This does not mean that there are no guidelines to assist in analysing the data. But guidelines and procedural suggestions are not rules. Applying guidelines requires judgement and creativity. Because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique. Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst. The human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis (Patton, 1990:372)

In this study, qualitative data are mostly used to narrate changes in the social and economic relationships in the village, and people's thoughts about these changes. The data were generally analysed against the theoretical framework adopted in this study. For example, while analysing the security-mobility system in the village, I have used the changes in social stratification as a theme, and then culled all relevant information gathered through in-depth interviews, focus-group discussions, observation notes, and informal interviews.

1.6 Organisation of thesis

This introductory chapter has sketched out the essential intellectual terrain of the thesis and outlined the methodology of data collection and analysis. With these aspects made clear, we can move on to the detailed research.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the traditional caste system in Kerala and how it has been transformed in recent decades by social, political and economic changes. Chapter 3 examines previous research on fertility transition in Kerala. It argues that the failure to consider the transformation of the caste system represents a significant weakness of the previous research on the topic. Chapter 4 gives a detailed quantitative overview of fertility and family planning in the study population, the Vettuvans of Engandiyour village. It shows that Vettuvan fertility is indeed extremely low and so its determinants may be broadly similar to those for scheduled castes throughout Kerala.

Chapter 5 describes the institutional setting of the fertility in Engandiyour village. It provides the detailed local perspective from which Vettuvan families take their childbearing decisions. It shows that the village's recent history is typical of much of Kerala. Chapter 6 considers the specific mobility and security motivations of Vettuvan families. It pays particular attention to marriage, sex roles and old-age security. Chapter 7 examines the perceived costs and benefits of children to Vettuvans, and how these correspond with the aspirations discussed in Chapter 6. Given the highly differentiated sex roles that exist, sons and daughters are considered separately.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a summary of the main findings and arguments. It also speculates on the possible wider significance of the results.

Chapter 2

Institutional Environment: Caste-System Changes, Social Development, and Economic Change in Kerala

Nothing more vividly illustrates the transformation of Kerala in the twentieth century than the way people use their hands. In the old Kerala that began to dissolve rapidly in the 1920s, a low-caste man put 'his left hand on his breast, and his right over his mouth', if he dared to speak to his superiors 'for fear his breath may pollute the air'. By the 1950s, however, it was more likely that men—and increasingly women too—would use their hands differently: as clenched fists, shaken above their heads, as they chanted 'Inquilab Zindabad' (victory to revolution) and marched in demonstrations (Jeffrey, 1992:1).

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of changes in the social and economic organisation of Kerala society and the economic and social implications of these for the scheduled-caste communities. This provides a macro-institutional setting for the discussions that follow in the remaining chapters about the fertility decline of the scheduled castes, and the study community in particular. I have outlined the traditional caste system that prevailed in Kerala during the nineteenth century in order to reveal the economic and social condition of the 'untouchables' in that period. An attempt is also made to illustrate the changes brought by various reform agents such as the Christian missionaries, the lower-caste reformers, Gulf migration, and the agrarian reforms of various governments in transforming Kerala from a society based on a traditional caste system to one based on a non-traditional caste system. In brief, the present chapter outlines institutional environment in Kerala: the regulative principles and the formal and informal organisations that structure Kerala society. As McNicoll (1994:206) noted, characterisation of any society by such features reflects its unique history.

2.2 The traditional caste system in Kerala

> Old Kerala [roughly before 1950s] was a place of boundaries and constraints—boundaries on where particular people might go; constraints on what they might do. People lived in discrete groups which connected with others in regulated, symbolic ways. In the seclusion of their great houses and palaces, a few high-status people, usually elders, made the major decisions about peace and war, land and trade, and sexual liaisons and religious ceremonies (Jeffrey, 1992:19).

The caste system had been the organisational principle of Kerala society for centuries (Jeffrey, 1994:241). Caste is a system of social stratification characterised by hierarchy, heredity, pursuit of one or a few particular occupations, inequality, endogamy, restriction as to taking food from outsiders, and the notion of 'purity' and 'pollution' associated with hierarchy (Jha, 1997:18). Under the caste system Hindu society is divided into four groups, or *chaturvarna.* Each group in the *chaturvarna* is known as a *varna* with different ritual 'purity' levels. Depending on the 'purity' level of each *varna*, caste or *jati* was determined[1]. Each caste will have a particular social status in the caste hierarchy and will have specific functions to perform. Accordingly, the Brahmins were at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. Those Hindus who do not come under these four caste categories were the 'untouchables'. They were also known as out-castes or inferior castes. While Brahmins hold the most prestigious profession of religious scholarship and teaching, the 'untouchables' were slaves doing all sorts of manual and menial jobs such as labouring and scavenging for higher castes. With minor differences the caste system was common in any Hindu society in India (Bains, 1994:4).

The basis of caste or *jati* lies in its theological ordination. The theory of *dharma* in Hinduism insists on the pursuit of the specific occupation assigned to each caste. Thus, persons born in one particular caste could not change their caste, that is, caste status was ascribed[2]. And they had to perform the occupation assigned to that caste; no change was feasible. The caste system, therefore, has been a closed system denying social mobility to its members (Bougle, 1958:30; Bailey, 1963:107-124). The main feature of the caste system relevant in this research is that it perpetuated inequality in society in such a way that the 'untouchables' had to suffer under this system for centuries (Bains, 1994:9-10).

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[1] There is some disagreement on the relation between *varna* and *jati.*

[2] Even in 1997, this aspect of caste prevailed in Engandiyour.

The caste system in Kerala is believed to have originated with the invasion of the Aryans[3] from north India sometime between the eighth and the eleventh century after Christ (Kurian, 1986:7). During the *sangam* age, the early centuries of the Christian era, caste-based social or economic organisation was absent in Kerala (Oommen, 1971:12). Historians suggest that when a decisive number of Aryans migrated to Kerala, they started to inject caste consciousness and the caste division into the society. While the Aryans retained their status as the top caste, the Brahmin, they passed on the next highest status to what had previously been the dominant sects. Thus, the rulers and their relatives were accepted as Kshatriyas and their military men as Sudras (Kurian, 1986:9). The Brahmins and Nairs were known as *savarnar* (Aiyappan, 1965:5). The trading communities of Kerala were Muslim and Christian rather than Hindus. Thus, Vaisya, the trading community found elsewhere in India, was not found in Kerala (Mathew, 1986:38; Kurian, 1986:9). The Aryans also created a number of inferior castes to provide various services for them and other upper castes. These inferior castes included the Ezavas and Kammalans, and were collectively known as *avarnar* (Aiyappan, 1965:5). There was yet another category of population who were not part of the caste hierarchy. They were the 'depressed' castes or 'untouchables', the scheduled castes of post-Independent India. Their position was the lowest in the whole society. Important castes, their occupations, and share in population are described in the following paragraphs and Table 2.1 to provide a clearer understanding of the various caste communities and their production relations in the traditional caste system of Kerala. It is important to mention here that, since Independence, caste-related information has not been collected in the Indian Censuses. The latest caste-based information available about Kerala is the 1968 Nettur Commission report. There is continuing debate about the inclusion of caste in the 2001 Indian Census (Pinto, 1998).

[3]Early invaders and settlers of the Indian subcontinent (Srinivasan, 1995:315).

Table 2.1: Castes and their characteristics in Kerala, 1968

Caste categories	Occupation	Kerala names	Per cent of Kerala population
Brahmins	Priests, Landlords	Namboodiri, Tamil Brahmin	2
Kshatriyas	Soldiers, Administrators	Upper Nair	2
Vaisyas	Artisans,	Kammalans	7
	Traders	Christians	21
		Muslims	19
Sudras	Cultivators, Servants	Lower Nair	14
	Coconut tree climbers	Ezavas (or Iravas, Thiyyas)	22
Untouchables	Farm and menial workers	Pulayas, Cherumas	8
Tribal population	Farmers and workers	Adivasi	1

Notes: Four per cent not accounted for above are for various other castes; the percentages are for 1968 as estimated in the Kerala government-sponsored Nettur Commission.
Source: Franke and Chasin, 1989:72.

While there are several views on when and how the caste system was formed in Kerala, it is indisputable that Kerala had a very strong caste system from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Aiyappan (1965:123) compared the caste system that existed in Kerala from the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century to South Africa's system of *Apartheid*. A nineteenth-century Indian reformer, Swami Vivekananda, called Kerala 'a madhouse of caste' (Franke and Chasin, 1989:75). The most important implication of the formation of the caste system in Kerala was the transfer of land from the local population to the Aryan immigrants, the Brahmins (Varghese, 1970:10-11; Oommen, 1971:13). It is reported that the local population handed over their land property to the temples in order to avoid paying tax to the government as temples were exempted from land tax[4]. Oommen (1971) argues that the Brahmins, who were the custodians of the temples, legalised the land given to the temples by the local population to their advantage.

[4]All other land property was taxed by the then Chera Kings to finance their war with the Chola Kings.

Eventually, the local population of Kerala became economically and socially marginalised. In the course of time the legal owners of the land became tenants of the upper-caste Hindus. Thus, the formation of the caste system in Kerala pushed the local population to the lowest social and economic levels.

2.2.1. Namboodiris

Namboodiris are the Kerala Brahmin. As mentioned earlier, they occupied the highest position in the caste hierarchy (Alexander, 1968:41; Fuller, 1976:33-34; Jeffrey, 1994:11). In 1968 the Namboodiris accounted for only about two per cent of Kerala's total population (Franke and Chasin, 1989:72); yet they controlled virtually all the land in Kerala (Shea, 1959:76; Oommen, 1971:11; Herring, 1983:158). According to legend, the god Parasuraman, who is credited with the creation of Kerala, awarded all of the land in it to the Namboodiris and hence they become the owners of the Kerala land (Jeffrey, 1994:25). Thus, they were both socially and economically the highest community in Kerala. Their supremacy in Kerala society is evident in Nagam Aiya's report in the 1875 Census:

> His [the Brahmin's] tenants . . . bow down to him not simply as a landlord but as their royal liege and benefactor, their suzerain master, their household deity, their very God on earth... His position is holy; his directions are commands; his movements are processions; his meal is nectar. He is the holiest of human beings. He is the representative of God on earth (Census of 1875, quoted in Jeffrey, 1994:11)

In Kerala, before the 1950s, Namboodiris practised primogeniture; that is, only the eldest son was allowed to marry in his own caste. The Nair, a caste below them, welcomed Namboodiri males as evening visitors to have liaisons with their women, under the custom of *sambandam*[5] (Jeffrey, 1994:11). This custom of the Namboodiris is believed to have kept their population size static and their wealth from decreasing (Shea, 1959:77). But when the Nair changed their family organisation and inheritance practices, they became increasingly reluctant to allow the Namboodiri the liberty with their women they had previously enjoyed (Shea, 1959:78). The '1933 Act of Madras Namboodiri' permitted individual members of the Namboodiri community to claim separate shares of family property. The Act also allowed children of younger sons to inherit property. Owing to several forces, the traditional social and economic status of the Namboodiri caste disappeared in Kerala after the 1950s.

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[5] *Sambandam* means 'connection'. For a full discussion on *sambandam*, see Fuller, 1976:73-122.

2.2.2. Nair (Nayar)

The Nair constitute the *Sudra* (the rulers of this community, the Upper Nair, were known as Kshatriya) community of Kerala. They were second to the Namboodiri in the social and economic hierarchy of Kerala society. There are several divisions within the Nair, some with lower and others with higher status (Shea, 1959:79; Fuller, 1976:38-43). Iyer (1970:48) reported that there were 116 subdivisions among the Nair in 1901. Thus, the Nair were highly heterogeneous both in social and economic terms. In 1968 they accounted for about 16 per cent of the Kerala population. But the higher-status Nair were only two per cent of Kerala's population (Franke and Chasin, 1989:72).

The Nair practised matrilineal kinship until around 1933 (Shea, 1959:79). Their marriage system, *sambandam*, allowed women to choose any husband they wanted, and to have any number of them with the consent of the *tharavad karanavar*, the joint family head. In 1933, the Madras *marumakkattayam* Act, which enabled partition of *tharavad,* led to several changes in the social and economic life of the Nair. Until about the beginning of the twentieth century they dominated Kerala's economic and social life. Jeffrey, an expert on the Nair community, noted the following at the end of his book *The Decline of Nair Dominance in Kerala:*

> . . . by the beginning of the twentieth century, it was apparent that they [Nair] could no longer regard buoyancy as their birthright; in future, like Christians and avarna Hindus, they too would have to swim (Jeffrey, 1994:247).

2.2.3 Thiyyas or Ezavas (Izhuvans)

Thiyyas[6] are mostly concentrated in north Kerala, and Ezavas in south Kerala. They were one of the lower castes in Kerala. The Ezavas are believed to be the descendants of those who migrated from Ceylon[7], the present Sri Lanka (Aiyappan, 1965:119-120; Iyer, 1970:5). The Ezavas have been a numerically significant caste in Kerala; they constituted about 22 per cent of Kerala's population in 1968 (Franke and Chasin, 1989:72). In the new Kerala, they have emerged to become a progressive community because of their educational and economic advancement (Mathew, 1986:23; Velayudhan, 1998:2480).

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[6]Also known as *chogans* in north Travancore and Cochin.

[7]This view is criticised by Gopalakrishnan (1994:285-86) quoting a study by Aiyangar (undated) that argued that since the total population of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1891 was 30 lakhs (3 million) and the total number of Ezavas and Tamil Channas was 20 lakhs in south India during the same time, it is not likely that about two-thirds of Ceylon's population would have migrated to South India.

2.2.4. Scheduled castes

The constitutional order for recognising the scheduled castes was issued under Article 341 of the Constitution of India. This Article declares that 'The President 'may with respect to any State or Union Territory, and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races, or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union Territory, as the case may be' (Wadhwa, 1975:250). It is further stated in Article 366 (24) that 'Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification any caste, race, or tribe'. Therefore, Scheduled Castes may be defined as those groups which are included in the Scheduled Caste Order of the Government of India, in force from time to time. The Scheduled Caste Order is, thus, an order containing a list of castes entitled to benefit from the various special arrangements such as reservations in employment and education, and soft loans. This Schedule was originally promulgated by the British Government of India in 1936, but the term 'scheduled castes' only became widely used after Independence (Mendelsohn and Vicziany, 1998:4; Santhakumari, n.d.:2-3). The terms Harijan[8] and 'untouchables' are also used to denote the same groups of people. The scheduled castes of Kerala are the former untouchable castes of Hinduism (Santhakumari, n.d.:3). In this thesis, the term 'scheduled caste' will refer to both the scheduled castes of post-Independent India and the pre-Independent Harijan or 'untouchables'. It is also important to note that the scheduled castes represent only the weaker (socially and economically) sections of the Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist society (Ghosh, 1997). In 1950 an Order made under Article 341 of the Constitution had declared that 'no person who professes a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed to be a member of Scheduled Caste', but in 1956 the Sikh religion was included with Hinduism as part of this order. In 1990 Buddhist scheduled castes were treated on a par with Hindus. However, scheduled-caste converts to Islam or Christianity are not considered as members of the scheduled castes (Ghosh, 1997:149,154-155).

In India, the scheduled-caste population according to the 1991 census was 138.2 million, 16.7 per cent of India's total population. In 1991, Kerala's scheduled-caste population was 2.9 million, 9.9 per cent of the total population (Director of Census

[8]The term 'Harijan' meaning Sons of God was coined by Mahatma Gandhi for the lower-caste people of India.

Operations, 1991). The 1981 Census recorded 68 scheduled castes in Kerala. A list of these scheduled-caste communities is given in Appendix-3.

2.2.5. Christians

Christianity is one of the important religions in Kerala, accounting for one-fifth of its population (Director of Census Operations, 1991). Syrian Christians are believed to have been converts of upper castes by St Thomas in the first century A.D. (Kurian, 1986:1; Jeffrey, 1994:16). The new Christians (*pudiya* Christians) are the descendants of the members of lower castes such as the Ezavas, the Pulayas and the Parayas, converted by the missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kurian, 1986:3). Among the Christians, like the Hindus, there are several different groups indicating their different origin and status in Kerala society (Iyer, 1970:51). For example, the status of *pudiya* Christians is as low as other lower castes (Fuller, 1976:36), but the Syrian Christians enjoy a status comparable to that of the Nair. Christians are mostly concentrated in the Travancore and Cochin regions of the state.

2.2.6. Muslims

Arab traders are believed to have introduced Islam into Kerala during the seventh or eighth century A.D. It was during the time of Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan[9] that many Hindus were converted to Islam. Shea (1959:89) argues that lower-caste Hindus were converted to Islam from 1871. From the presence of new Islam (*pudiya* Islam) and the evidence based on differences in inheritance laws and caste customs prevailing among Muslims, it is almost certain that there has been conversion of Hindus to Islam. According to Shea (1959:89) conversion offered the low-caste Hindu an escape from onerous indignities, a mass inferiority complex, and possibly abject poverty.

In Kerala, Muslims have been mostly concentrated in the Malabar district (Fuller, 1976:36). Their economic position before the 1950s was poor as they were tenants to the upper-caste Hindus. Although they remained outside the caste hierarchy, socially and economically their status was roughly comparable to that of the Ezavas (Radhakrishnan, 1980:2095). The Mappila rebellion[10] of 1921 was a result of this

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[9]They conquered Malabar and converted many Hindus to Islam.

[10]Mappilas are the Muslims of Malabar region. During the Mappila riots, reported murders numbered 468, dacoities 5941, arson 352. The most distressing occurrence which took place on 10 November 1921 resulted in the death by asphyxiation of 70 Mappila persons while they were being

exploitation by upper-caste Hindus and the colonial state which provided support for this exploitation (Panikkar, 1989). Muslims, like Christians, constitute nearly one-fifth of Kerala's total population (Director of Census Operations, 1991).

2.3 The economic and social situation of the lower castes under the traditional caste system

The description of the social situation of the scheduled-caste communities in Kerala in this section refers mostly to the time when the traditional caste system was in practice: before the middle of the twentieth century. However, each social practice discussed below had its own time span; some were abolished earlier than others.

2.3.1 'Untouchability' and 'unapproachability'

As indicated earlier, the caste system existed in Kerala in one of its severest forms (Shea, 1959:88; Iyer, 1970:46; Jeffrey, 1994:2; Gopalakrishnan, 1994:292). Social distances between the various caste groups were extremely rigid (Jeffrey, 1994:18-19). This is evident from the physical distance that the lower castes had to maintain from the higher castes. For example, a Nair had to keep seven feet away from a Namboodiri; an Ezava 32 feet; a Cheruman 64 feet; and a Nayadi from 74 to 124. The Ezava on the other hand had to keep 32 feet away from a Nair, and a Cheruman 32 from an Ezava. In some areas, lower castes were even 'unseeable', as the mere sight of them ritually polluted their social superiors (Zachariah, 1968:368). The low castes such as Ezava and Kammalans, and scheduled castes were not permitted to use the roads and other public places used by upper castes. They were prohibited not only from entering a Hindu temple but even from going close to it. They were also forbidden to go to schools where the upper-caste children studied. Huts of the scheduled castes were located at a distant place from the Namboodiri *illum* and Nair *taraward*. What this meant was that scheduled-caste people had to have a highly secluded lifestyle, restricted to agricultural fields and huts. How these exploitative traditions have been abolished is discussed in sections 2.5 and 2.7 which examine the role of Christian missionaries, lower-caste reformers, and land reform in changing Kerala society.

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conveyed from the disturbed area to the Bellary jail (*Madras District Gazetteers,* 1933:viii). For a field-based investigation of the underlying causes of the Malabar rebellion, see Panikkar, 1989.

2.3.2. Slavery and serfdom (*adima sambradayam*)

Slavery was yet another element in the caste system that placed the scheduled castes in an economically exploitative situation:

> One of the most striking and important peculiarities of the Indian forms of servitude is their close connection with the caste-system. Most types of servile status were hereditary, and in general the 'serfs' and 'slaves' belonged to the lowest castes (Kumar, 1965:34).

Slavery in Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore had prevailed from remote times, most probably from the time of the conquest of the aboriginal inhabitants by the invaders and settlers from north India (Kurian, 1986:11). Table 2.2 provides information about the percentage of slaves to the total population of British Malabar during the period 1800 to 1901. The table shows that about 10-15 per cent of Malabar's total population during the period 1800-1901 were agricultural or government slaves. The slaves, invariably, were from the scheduled-caste communities of Kerala (Kumar, 1965:34-41, 68).

Table 2.2: Slaves/serfs as a percentage of total population, Malabar, 1800-1901

Year	% of slaves
1800-1	13-15
1807	13.7
1819	15.2
1857	11.7
1871	13.2
1881	11.7
1891	11.9
1901	10.5

Source: Kumar, 1965:54.

Among the scheduled-caste communities, Cheruman, Pulaya, Paraya, Vettuvan, and Ulladar were some of the important slaves of Kerala (Eapen, 1985:32). As a result of hard work and poor working conditions, most of the slaves had poor health. The food grain they received for a day's work was significantly lower than that needed for the amount of work they did, and for maintaining good health. When the slaves

fell sick, they received no food grain from the landlord. The overall situation of a slave can be no better explained than by citing Samuel Mateer:

> The men are in wretched filthy clothes. There is much suffering from sickness, the dirt of the house produces vermin and itch, which deprives them of rest by day and sleep by night. A respectable native must cover his nostrils with his cloth when he enters amongst them, for the stench and filth. The aged, if there are any, suffer from debility, and may lie helpless day after day until they die; infants suffer from sores, diarrhoea, worms and want of food; adults from headache and indigestion, ague, dysentry, [sic] and intermittent fever (Mateer, 1884 quoted in Jeffrey, 1994:22).

Reports indicate that slaves were treated like animals by their masters, the upper caste landlords. For example, slaves could be traded, sold or mortgaged for money or kind[11]. The owner had the right to kill a slave. When slaves were sold, families were separated[12]. Children born to a slave were the property of the owner (Kumar, 1965:37; Fuller, 1976:22). Under slavery, scheduled-caste people had no economic or social independence. Various attempts to abolish slavery in Kerala are discussed in section 2.5.

2.3.3. *Uriyam,* or forced labour

Uriyam, or forced labour, was another version of slavery practised in Kerala. Both landlords and governments were reported to have used this system to force scheduled-caste people to do work for very low or no remuneration. *Uriyam* was used in non-agricultural sectors. Governments employed the system to construct roads and other government works. Landlords forced scheduled-caste people to work for temples and other public places.

2.3.4. Breastcloth

The basic right to even cover one's own body was denied under the caste system, reflecting the extreme powerlessness of lower castes. Women of all castes below the Nair were forbidden to wear breastcloths. Similarly, the lower-caste men were denied covering below their knees. None of the scheduled castes were allowed to

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[11]Buchanan (1870:67-68 cited in Kumar, 1965:36) mentions three modes of transferring slaves (i) *jamam* or sale , where the full value of the slave was given and the property entirely handed over; (ii) *kanom* or mortgage, where the proprietor received a loan and a quantity of rice, to show that his property in the slave was not extinguished, but could be resumed once the loan was repaid; (iii) *pattan* or rent, where the slave was hired out for an annual sum, the hirer paying the cost of maintenance.

[12]However in some areas in Malabar, there were restrictions on selling a husband and wife to two different people.

use foot wear. Section 2.5 will discuss various efforts to eradicate this practice from Kerala society.

2.3.5. Land-caste relationships under the traditional caste system in Kerala

In Kerala, roughly up to 1950, there existed a clear land-caste relationship in Kerala (Herring, 1983:158). In the caste system, as indicated earlier, the Brahmin were the legal owners of land, *janmon* right[13], that is they had absolute, tax-free proprietorship. They did not cultivate the land they owned according to the *janmon* rights (Baden-Powell, 1892:154; Kumar, 1965:23-26). They entrusted their land to the Nair who assumed *kanom* rights, absolute proprietorship with a small tax. They had the right to sublet the land to others. Thus, the Nair in turn let out the land to the tenants or *karalar* who were mostly Ezavas, Syrian Christians, and Muslims. These tenants with the slaves (scheduled castes of post-Independent India) cultivated land (Miller, 1961:264; Herring, 1983:157). Thorner (1956:35 quoted in Herring, 1983:157) observed that 'a many-tiered edifice of interests in the land—janmies, kanamdars, verumpattamdars—rests on a mass of landless labourers known as Cherumas, Pulayas, or Poliyars'. Kumar (1965:66) noted that in Malabar the lower castes almost never held any land and that their opportunities for mobility were very limited. It was, however, the scheduled-caste population who worked in agriculture and fed the entire upper castes under the regime of the feudal caste system. Table 2.3 summarises the land-caste situation existing in Kerala in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Table 2.3: Caste and land relations in early twentieth century, Kerala

Caste	Right to land
Namboodiri	Absolute right over land
Nair	Absolute right over land with tax paid to Brahmin
Ezava	Tenants to Nair, rent to be paid to Nair
Untouchables	Landless labourers with no rights to any of their produce

Source: Kumar, 1965:66.

[13]The legend of the origin of *janmom* illustrates the relationship between ritual status and land. Having created Kerala, Parasuraman divided it among the Namboodiri Brahmins, who acquired absolute right to the soil (Jeffrey, 1994:25).

Although the British fully colonised Malabar in the nineteenth century, no change in the status of the scheduled castes took place. In fact, the British rule in Malabar in the 1800s was reported to have had a negative effect on the tenants as the land revenue system was made permanent, affecting all land bought under that system (Kumar, 1965:87). Kumar notes:

> . . . when the British took over the district [Malabar] in 1792, . . . the British not only made settlements with them but issued a proclamation recognising them as 'landlords' with the right to expel the *kanamdars* when their leases expired (Kumar, 1965:87-88).

Although some efforts were made by the British in the subsequent years to retrieve the situation by means of tenancy legislation, the legislation benefited only a small number of well-to-do tenants leaving a large mass of cultivating tenants (Namboodiripad, 1968:94). Thus, the British rule in Malabar only reinforced the caste based land relationship that existed.

Data on land holding by various communities in the Travancore region in 1931 suggests a clear land-caste association (see Table 2.4). For example, Brahmins held, on average, 15.6 acres of cultivable land per owner and 12.89 acres of non-cultivable land per owner. The Nair on the other hand, who possessed about 39 per cent of the total cultivable land, possessed only 1.71 acres of cultivable land per owner. Partition in the joint families in the 1920s and 1930s is attributed to such low holdings of cultivable land among the Nair (Sivanandan, 1979:475). What is important to note, however, is the fact that most of the land (about 74 per of cultivable land and 62 per cent of non-cultivable land) in Travancore regions was held by upper-caste Hindus and Syrian Christians. The 'depressed' castes held only 0.85 per cent of the total cultivable land and 2.43 per cent of non-cultivable land in the Travancore region. A similar trend existed in the land holding pattern in Ramanakara (located in Travancore) where Fuller (1976) studied the Nair community during the period 1971-72. According to the land records of Ramanakara village in 1908, Nair and Brahmins held about 64 per cent of the total land in the village (Fuller, 1976:29). Fuller's own survey in the village also indicated that about 43 per cent of the Nair held about 86 per cent of the total land (Fuller, 1976:30).

Table 2.4: Landholding by caste in Travancore, 1931

Caste	Proportion of area		Average area per owner	
	Cultivable Land	Non-cultivable Land	Cultivable Land	Non-cultivable land
Brahmin	8.75	3.05	15.60	12.89
Nair	38.70	30.18	1.71	2.95
Syrian Christian	26.08	29.03	2.69	3.90
Muslim	5.02	6.13	1.72	2.69
Ezava	6.77	12.13	1.11	1.95
Other Hindu	10.88	9.12	1.85	1.48
Other Christians	2.95	7.93	1.07	2.28
Depressed Hindu[a]	0.85	2.43	1.03	1.43
All communities	100.00	100.00	2.20	2.57

Note: [a]Refers to the scheduled castes of the post-Independent India.
Source: Sivanandan, 1979:475.

A clear association between caste and land is thus evident from the information available from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Kerala. The discussion in this section shows that the scheduled castes had been subjected to both social and economic subordination in the period before the 1950s.

2.4 Lower-caste reforms and the caste-system changes before Independence

Notable lower-caste reforms began in Kerala during the nineteenth century. Two major factors that initiated lower-caste reforms in Kerala were the activities of Christian missionaries and of the social-reform leaders from the lower-caste communities. It is the work of these two groups of reformers that later translated into the communist movements and progressive governments that made relevant legislation for the social and economic development of the lower-caste people of Kerala. The following two sections deal with the role of Christian missionaries and the lower-caste reformers in improving the social and economic status of the lower castes.

2.4.1. Role of Christian missionaries

When Christian missionaries came to Kerala in the early nineteenth century, the scheduled castes were suffering under the caste system. Evidence indicates that until the 1840s there was very little challenge to the governments or landlords from the missionaries or from the lower castes (Jeffrey, 1994:34). But the missionary build-up gradually changed that position. The missionaries' commitment to the uplift of the lower castes is evident in Jeffrey's words:

> The missionaries, however, were prepared to challenge the principles of Malayali [people of Kerala] society—the hierarchy of ritual status, the privileges of the high castes and the disabilities of the low—and to call on British governments to force the Travancore sirkar [government] to change some of its discriminatory laws (Jeffrey, 1994:35).

The two important missionary groups that worked in Kerala and contributed significantly to the social and economic uplift of the lower castes were the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS). In 1847, the CMS and the LMS[14] joined to protest against slavery of lower castes. They presented a joint petition to the Travancore Maharaja (King). This petition, signed by 12 missionaries, pleaded for the abolition of slavery. The missionaries again petitioned in 1848 as there was no significant response to their earlier appeal. During the same period missionaries worked closely with slaves, and a few schools were opened for them. This aroused conflicts between the mission, and the landlords and government. The impression propagated by the landlords and the government in refusing missionary appeals against the slavery was that liberation from slavery would have a negative effect on agricultural production. However, missionaries continued their efforts by publications and in other ways to send the message to England and other British locations in India. Although the Travancore *sirkar* (government) proclamation entitled the emancipation of children born after 1853 from *sirkar* slavery, it was not considered a significant measure because only about 6,000 slaves were under *sirkar*, while altogether about 130,000 slaves were in Travancore. After a series of struggles with the Travancore *sirkar*, Madras government and landlords, the missionaries succeeded in achieving their goal on 24 June, 1855 when the proclamation of the abolition of slavery was formally issued (Eapen, 1985; Jeffrey, 1994).

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[14]CMS activities in Kerala are discussed in detail in Chapters 1 and 2 of Eapen (1985).

In the Malabar region which was under the direct rule of British, slavery was abolished in 1843 (Gopalakrishnan, 1994:470) as a result of Britain's abolition of slavery in 1792.

Uriyam, or forced labour, another economic exploitation of the lower castes, was yet another focus of attack for the missionaries. As early as 1815, missionaries were successful in making Syrian Christians and other Christians exempt from performing *uriyam* for temples. In 1821, Christian converts also received the right not to perform *uriyam* on Sundays. The practice of *uriyam* is reported to have continued in the countryside, and the missionaries had to have the proclamation repeated in 1851. Christian converts' right not to follow the caste-system rules from that point increased tremendously. Seeing the converts, their fellow caste-men also avoided *uriyam.* By 1857 *uriyam* had decreased remarkably. After Independence, the constitution of India also banned forced labour. Article 23 of the Indian Constitution states 'Traffic in human beings and *begar* and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence publishable in accordance with law' (Wadhwa, 1975:249).

The missionaries' role in achieving the right to use breastcloths was far more significant in reducing the caste distinctions than its own merit as an individual right. In 1829, after some rioting with upper castes, the missionaries achieved confirmation of an earlier proclamation allowing converts to wear a jacket, but not the upper cloth of the Nair or the blouse of the Tamil Brahmin. Because of their poverty converts could not use this opportunity. The missionaries' efforts to bring clothes from England helped the converts to wear them. The use of upperclothes aroused conflicts between converts and upper castes. After a series of petitions and disturbances the right to use an upper covering, which was granted to Hindus and Christian Shanar[15] women in 1859, was extended to all women in 1865, although the style used by Nair women was still forbidden to the low castes (Gopalakrishnan, 1994:472).

Jeffrey (1994:62) argues that the missionaries offered the low castes resources which had not previously been available to them. It was the efforts of the Christian missionaries in Kerala that prepared the state for later reforms to take place. They showed the lower castes, the suppressed, that they had been exploited and that they needed to organise and fight for equality. The most important resource they provided to them was education. The Christian missionaries were the first reformers

[15]Lower-caste converts to Christianity.

who sowed the seeds of a non-traditional caste system in Kerala.

2.4.2. Role of lower-caste social reformers

As indicated, the work of Christian missionaries helped abolish several social practices associated with the caste system in Kerala. The missionaries also gave tremendous leadership and courage to the lower castes to fight against the injustices perpetrated against them by the upper castes. Improving education of the scheduled castes seems to have been important in this regard. It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that lower-caste reformers emerged as fighters for their own uplift. One of the prominent figures among such reformers was the Ezava leader, Sree Narayana Guru. The doctrine of this eminent man was 'one caste, one religion, and one God', which attracted many Keralans, including some from the upper castes (Gopalakrishnan, 1994:514). Sree Narayana Guru's efforts to abolish social injustices such as 'untouchability', 'unapproachability', and non-entry to temples, were made through his Sree Narayana Guru Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP Yogam), an Ezava organisation formed in 1903[16]. The Vaikom *satyagraha,* or truth struggle of 1924 and Guruvayoor *satyagraha* of 1931-32 are the two landmark events that sought temple entry, thus removing 'untouchability' from Kerala (Franke and Chasin, 1989:78). Sree Narayana Guru's and the SNDP's efforts were significant in the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 in Travancore, even though the Guru died in 1928. In Madras Presidency, the Temple Entry Act was passed in 1938 (Iyer, 1970:50). 'Untouchability' was banned in India under Article 17 of the Indian Constitution (Wadhwa, 1975:249) which in 1955 became the 'Untouchability' Offence Act (Bains, 1994:24).

A Pulaya (scheduled caste) reformer, Ayankali, is one, among others, who fought for temple entry, school entry, and the abolition of slavery and other social injustice against the lower castes in general and Pulayas in particular. He organised Sadujana Paripalana Sangam in 1905 to organise all Pulayas to fight against social injustices. Organised efforts by the 'untouchables' were influenced by the revolt of the Ezavas, who formed the most influential community among the lower castes (Mathew, 1986:26). While the contributions of the lower-caste reformers were not sufficient to eradicate the entire system of injustice that prevailed under the caste system, they paved the way for organising the lower castes and fighting for social and economic justice, which led to later communist activities in the state.

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[16]See Menon, 1994:61-71 for a detailed discussion of SNDP in the Kerala social reform.

2.5 Communist ideology and land-reform agenda in Kerala

The roots of communist thinking in Kerala can be traced to various sources. One is the efforts made by the Christian missionaries and reformers from the lower castes to seek social and economic equality for the lower castes. Sree Narayana Guru's organisation, SNDP Yogam, is considered by some historians as the foundation for communist development in Kerala (Gopalakrishnan, 1994:528). In Kerala, the role of the missionaries was to educate the lower castes about their rights and modernise their thinking through education, enabling them to take up jobs in non-traditional areas, and eradicating some of the social evils in the society. Although the Christian missionaries did not directly influence the formation of a communist movement in Kerala, their efforts were strong enough to empower the lower castes to organise and demand a change.

The successes in removing some of the social practices of the caste system such as 'untouchability', 'unapproachability', and non-entry to temples moved Kerala society from an extreme caste-system society to a moderate caste-system society. It is believed that in the aftermath of the temple-entry struggles, the lower castes became more and more united with the Kerala's growing trade union and Communist movement (Franke and Chasin, 1989:79-80).

However, there is little evidence of any attack by the Christian missionaries or the lower caste reformers on tenancy. The major obstacle that the majority of lower caste tenant communities faced during this time was the high rent associated with tenancy. Thus, up to the mid-1950s, the lower-caste communities continued to suffer socially and economically. The issue of tenancy and high rents was the issue that led to further struggle and transformed the lower caste struggle to a more communist movement in Kerala. The tenancy and rent situation that existed in Kerala before Independence is discussed in the following paragraphs.

A survey conducted by the Malabar Tenancy Committee[17] (MTC) in Malabar in 1940 revealed that 90 per cent of the total cultivated land was owned by non-cultivators and was leased out to cultivators (Namboodiripad, 1968:95). The situation in Cochin was similar to that existing in Malabar. Data on rent paid to landlords gathered in a survey conducted by Cochin Kisan Sabha[18] (CKS) in 1948

[17]Malabar Tenancy Committee was formed in 1940 as a result of pressure from peasant unions for making more land available for cultivation. During the 1930s there was a shortage of food grains and control was exercised over existing stocks by landlords (Menon, 1994:163).
[18]Cochin farmers' association.

revealed that the rent paid to landlords varied from 62 per cent to 90 per cent of the gross produce (Namboodiripad, 1968:96). The 1931 economic survey conducted in Travancore also revealed similar exploitation of the tenants by upper castes (Namboodiripad, 1968:97). A study in Cochin in 1940 revealed that cultivator households were paying at least 50 per cent and sometimes even above 75 per cent of the gross returns to their landlords (Herring, 1983:161). Varghese (1970:41) also reported higher land revenue during the nineteenth century in Malabar, where in the case of cultivators, if tenants were unable to pay the rent, the landlords had the power to evict them without compensation.

The major political, social and economic issue in Kerala after the independence of India in 1947 was the various aspects of tenancy. With agrarian reforms as the major agenda item, the Communist movement emerged as a full-blown political party ready to contest power in the State Assembly when India became independent. The next section discusses the post-Independence reforms, particularly those that occurred after the formation of the present Kerala state in 1956.

2.6 Land reform and caste-system changes since the formation of Kerala state

The Communist Party in Kerala, as elsewhere, asserted its ideological position as the provider of social-economic justice to the disadvantaged communities, who had been exploited socially and economically by the upper-caste Hindus. They stood for the causes of the lower castes, peasants, and industrial workers of Kerala. The Communists used the slogan 'land to the tiller' in their various electoral campaigns all over Kerala (Gopalan, 1959). They proclaimed that they would bring radical changes in the exploitative agrarian relations in Kerala. The poor, the lower castes, and other socio-economically backward communities perceived the Communist Party as their political organisation.

This feeling was reflected in the first general election after the formation of Kerala State in 1956. It was no surprise that the Communists won the election, as the majority of the Kerala population was experiencing some form of social or economic exploitation, whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian. This is very clear from the fact that the Communists gained representation from areas where poor peasants and labourers were concentrated (Herring, 1983:163). The government in Kerala was unique in that it was the first democratically elected Communist government in the world. Regarding the significance of the victory of the Communist Party, A.K.Gopalan, an architect of Kerala Communist Party, wrote in 1959:

> And so in Kerala, for the first time in India, or in any capitalist country, a Communist-led government was formed through the process of elections conducted under bourgeois rule (Gopalan, 1959:95)

One of the important gains of the Communist government just after assuming power in 1957 was to stay the eviction of tenants (mostly *kudikidappukar*) by landlords by proclaiming the Stay of Eviction Proceedings Ordinance (United Nations, 1975:59; Herring, 1983:163). On 10 June, 1959 a set of comprehensive proposals for land reform, the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill[19] (KARB), was passed by the Legislative Assembly (State Parliament) (Herring, 1983:171). It sought to give permanent tenure rights to all tenants, to establish the right of tenants to purchase the land which they tilled, and to put a ceiling on the total area of land a primary family unit could own (Herring, 1983:164-166; Zachariah, 1983:173). The opposition to the Bill from the upper castes and other right-wing political parties was tremendous. This led to the downfall of the state government in 1959 by a presidential decree (United Nations, 1975:61; Ratcliffe, 1978:127). Although the Agrarian Relations Bill had been passed by the State Assembly, it had not received presidential assent, and thus was not a law (Herring, 1983:171).

In the subsequent elections, though the Communists increased their vote by nearly a million, right-wing parties won the election because of the united work of the opposition parties. A Congress-Praja Socialist-Party (PSP) government was then formed. This government revised and passed the Agrarian Relations Bill; it was signed to law on January 21, 1961, but was nullified by the Supreme Court in 1961 and Kerala High Court in 1963 (Herring, 1983:172-175). This government introduced the Kerala Land Reform Act, 1964 which dropped key radical changes proposed in favour of tenants by Communists. The Congress ministry fell in 1964 and Presidential Rule was in force until elections in 1967. This time the United Front[20] coalition led by the left wing of the Communist Party won the elections. In 1969 the left-wing government amended the 1964 Act which drastically changed the 1964 version in favour of the tenants. This Act came into effect on 1 January 1970. This Land Reform (Amendment) Act of 1969 enabled hut dwellers to become owners of the land on which their huts stood (United Nations, 1975:64).

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[19]The Bill was drafted by the revenue minister Ms. K.R. Goury in consultation with the Planning Commission, government of India. For a discussion about land reform efforts in the British Malabar See Radhakrishnan, 1980.

[20]The Communist Party had split in 1964 over a variety of issues. The faction with the more consistently left ideology retained the great majority of the party cadres and mass base, particularly the agrarian base and formed the Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPI(M). The right faction, known as the Communist Party of India , or CPI is a much smaller partner in the coalition (Herring, 1983:179).

The Kerala Land Reform Act is widely regarded as one of the most thorough and well implemented in South Asia (Herring, 1980:A-59; Franke and Chasin, 1989:58; Jeffrey, 1992:176).

> Rural labouring people made up close to 10 million people or 40 per cent of Kerala's total population in the 1980s. Their acquisition of their hut sites stands as the major achievement of the land reforms of the 1970s. . . The patch of ground on which they lived was their own, and they understood that now they had a right to it which they could defend with legal and political mechanisms if a former landlord tried to intimidate them (Jeffrey, 1992:180).

According to Ratcliffe (1978:128), the land reform in Kerala, although implemented imperfectly, served to redistribute income within the state. This experience is in sharp contrast to land reform measures legislated in the rest of India, where such reform either has not been implemented at all or has been implemented in such a way as to favour the privileged (Oommen, 1994:118).

According to Raj (United Nations, 1975:59), the political climate in Kerala has made implementation of the land reforms different from the rest of India. Regarding the effect of land reforms on the distribution of wealth Raj reports:

> Though the area of land transferred to the landless (mainly 'hutment dwellers') could not have been very much, there is no reason to doubt that land reforms in Kerala taken as a whole have helped to reduce inequalities in wealth and income, despite the limitations of the legislation and the impediments to its effective implementation (United Nations, 1975:70).

Herring (1983) has provided a complete account of events that led to the 1969 Land Reform Act in his book *Land to the Tiller.* According to Herring (1983:211), the core of the land reform—the abolition of landlordism[21]—was remarkably successful, despite delays, setbacks, and evasion. The land reforms benefited the scheduled-caste tenants, or *Kudikidappukar,* who leased a house-site and some land from landowners, but owned virtually no land. Such tenants constituted almost half of all tenants. The *kudikidappukar* on average received one-tenth of an acre of land under the land reform. However, this provided them considerable security particularly in contrast to their historical condition of slavery and serflike bondage (Herring, 1983:213).

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[21]Exploitative aspect.

Mencher's (1980) village studies in Palghat and Kuttanad regions in Kerala showed that land reforms did reduce larger land ownership of upper-caste Hindus. It also provided permanent rights to agricultural labourers over their houses and a tiny piece of land immediately around their houses. However, Mencher argues that there were still many families with very large land holdings in the surveyed villages. Families managed this by putting land in different names of relatives who did not live in the village. Further evidence arises from the fact that when the Agrarian Relations Bill was introduced in the State Assembly in 1959, it was estimated that a surplus of 720,000 hectares would be available for redistribution. But the extent of surrender was only 67,000 hectares, less than one-tenth of the estimated surplus (Oommen, 1994:126).

According to Oommen (1994:121-122), although 'landlordism' has been abolished from Kerala, one cannot say that land has passed on to a class of sturdy self-cultivating peasantry. Kerala had a large number of 'absentee' farmers, such as teachers, shopkeepers, lawyers, and government employees; and most politicians have their farming avocations. Although land reform provided ownership rights to the tenants, they still did not gain the land they cultivated. An important achievement, however, was the provision to assign one-tenth of an acre of land to the tenants, or *kudikidappukar,* who comprised the slaves of the past. It is estimated that 300,000 *kudikidappukars* benefited from the land reforms (Oommen, 1994:122).

Table 2.5: Percentage of rural labour households owning land, Kerala, 1950s to 1983-84

Years	Agricultural labour households owning land	Other rural labourer households owning land	Total households owning land
1950s	virtually none	virtually none	virtually none
1964-65	70	60	67
1983-84	92	95	93

Source: Jeffrey, 1992:179.

Franke and Chasin (1989) recognised the problems in transforming an agrarian society from a traditional caste system into a small farmer system. They concluded:

> Despite all these dangers and limitations, however, there can be little doubt that land reform has improved the lives of the vast majority of people in Kerala's countryside. For tenants who received rice land, the land is often the source of one-half to all of their basic food needs. Now there is no rent to be paid. Now there is no fear of eviction (Franke and Chasin, 1989:59).

To sum up, it is evident that many social practices that prevailed in Kerala associated with the caste system were removed in the twentieth century as a result of efforts by the missionaries and lower-caste reformers, and the effective implementation of the land reform by various governments.

2.7 Migration from Kerala

The purpose of this section is to outline the magnitude of migration from Kerala to other states in India and overseas for employment and its possible effect on the social and economic life in Kerala. The discussion in this section is based on published documents and research publications.

Migration of Keralans to countries such as Sri Lanka, Burma, and South Africa began in the early nineteenth century (Kumar, 1965:128,135). Most of the migrants to these countries were the poor, mostly agricultural labourers. The number of these migrants was not enough to make any radical changes in the social and economic conditions of Kerala. However, such migration is believed to have had some effect on the local social structure, as Kumar noted:

> Emigration [employment migration overseas] must also have increased social mobility in other ways; the emigrants would return with greater knowledge of agricultural techniques and less willingness to abide by caste restrictions. The emigration would be particularly strong for the lower castes since they were the more immobile (Kumar, 1965:142).

Although migration from Kerala began in the nineteenth century, Kerala remained a net in-migrant state till about the early twentieth century. It was only from the decade 1931-40 that Kerala experienced significant net out-migration (Kurup *et al*, 1965:14-15). In the twentieth century, Keralans have migrated on a large scale to industrial cities such as Madras, Bombay, Delhi, and Calcutta for employment. The majority of the migrants in this category were educated men and women.

Migration of Keralans for employment to the Gulf countries began after the land reforms were implemented in the 1970s. Although there is evidence that people from India had been migrating to the Gulf countries as early as the 1950s and 1960s (Gulati, 1983:2), the momentum increased in the 1970s when oil prices shot up (Nair, 1994). The pioneers of the 1970s upsurge were the Muslims of Kerala (Gulati, 1983). However, all other communities subsequently followed the trend. In 1990 the number of Indians in the Gulf was estimated to be around 900,000 to one million. According to the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS, 21 per cent of the 4,387 households surveyed had at least one migrant related to the head of the household working outside the country, most of them in the Gulf countries. Table 2.9 shows the number of workers in the Gulf region from India and Kerala during the period from 1975 to 1982. The table shows that, overall, about half of the migrants in the Gulf region from India were Keralans. However, over time the proportion of Keralans has reduced.

Table 2.6: Number of migrant workers in the Gulf region from India and Kerala, 1975-82 (in thousands)

Year	India	Kerala	Per cent
1975	154	n.a	--
1977	214	135	63
1979	350	187	53
1982	800	350	44

Source: Gulati, 1983:37.

As revealed in Table 2.7, migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries is not uniform. The highest number of migrants has been from the Trichur and Malapuram districts. A closer examination reveals that these districts, particularly Malapuram district, have the highest proportions of Muslim population. It is reported that because of the religious affiliation, Muslims are more prone to migrate to the Gulf countries than are other communities (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:191). This fact is further supported by the findings from the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS that current migrants are more likely to be Muslim than Hindu or Christian (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:191). The scheduled castes are the least likely to migrate. The Kerala NFHS indicated that of the total scheduled-caste households surveyed less than three per cent had a migrant in the Gulf or in a foreign country. This is in contrast to about 22 per cent among the non-scheduled-caste households (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:191). No study to date

can suggest reasons for the non-participation of the scheduled castes in the Gulf migration. Poor educational levels of the scheduled castes compared to other communities cannot be a reason, as illiterates have constituted a good proportion among the Gulf migrants (Gulati, 1983:39). Factors related to their poor economic and social status seem to be more relevant. It is possible that the scheduled castes could not raise the funds needed for the initial expenses in arranging a visa and tickets.

Table 2.7: Distribution of emigrants to the Gulf region, by districts, Kerala, 1980

District	Number of emigrants, (thousands)	Number of emigrants, per 1000 population
Trivandrum	21.1	8.14
Quilon	18.8	6.67
Alleppy	17.0	7.25
Kottayam	4.2	2.45
Idukki	0.3	0.30
Ernakulam	3.8	1.51
Trichur[a]	37.9	15.53
Palghat	7.0	3.44
Malapuram	34.8	14.50
Calicut	17.1	6.49
Cannanore	24.6	8.27
Kerala	186.6	7.33

Note: [a]Study district.
Source: Nair, 1994:104.

Regarding other characteristics of the migrants, the Kerala NFHS indicated that nearly three-fourths of the migrants had completed middle school or less (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995). Data based on a 1979 survey also indicated poor educational levels for the migrants. Thus, Gulf migration, by and large, has been unskilled migration: nearly 50 per cent of the migrants were labourers or engaged in unskilled work (Gulati, 1983:39). Yet another feature of Gulf migration is the dominance of males. The Kerala NFHS revealed that 93 per cent of the migrants were males, and most of them were under 30 years of age. While there are some reports in the popular magazines (for example, *India Today*, 1982) about the

social effect of the Gulf migration, only a few studies based on serious research are concerned with the impact of Gulf migration on the family of the migrants.

Gulati's (1983) study focuses on the effects of Gulf migration on the family. Increased inter-family interaction, an increase in joint living, an increase in female-centred households, an increase in dowry, and an increase in women's responsibilities were some of the important effects. On the psychological side, women in the migrant families faced many tensions, pressures, conflicts and anxieties. Nair (1994:107), on the contrary, believes that the negative stories about the impact of Gulf migration are exaggerated. He argues that households of migrants have, on the whole, admirably adjusted to the changed situation and encountered the problems completely and effectively. One of the important socio-economic effects of Gulf migration was to change the traditional pattern of distribution of wealth. Nair (1983:90) showed that families that were looked down upon until they had become a Gulf migrant family were now invited to social occasions as they became richer from remittances from the Gulf.

While there could be several consequences of migration, the economic effect on migrant families has been significant and immediate. Table 2.8 shows remittances from the Gulf countries to India and Kerala's share of the remittances. According to Nair's (1994:109) estimate the total remittances to Kerala between 1975-1988 amounted to about Rs. 7,000 crores (70,000 millions). However, he suggests that if remittances through non-banking channels are included the amount could be over Rs. 10,000 crores.

Table 2.8: Estimated remittances to India and Kerala from the Gulf region, 1975-1988

Years	Remittances to India (Rs. crores)	Share of Kerala in remittances (Rs. crores)	Per cent of Kerala share
1975-76	132	66	50.0
1976-77	270	135	50.0
1977-78	487	243	49.8
1978-79	481	240	49.8
1979-80	790	395	50.0
1980-81	1,219	609	49.9
1981-82	1,098	549	50.0
1982-83	1,371	685	49.9
1983-84	1,500	750	50.0
1984-85	1,714	857	50.0
1985-86	1,628	814	50.0
1986-87	1,717	858	49.9
1987-88	2,028	1,014	50.0
Total	14,435	7,215	49.9

Source: Nair, 1994:109.

A survey conducted in 1983 among 696 households in Kerala indicated that about 40 per cent of the households spent remittances on either constructing or renovating their houses. The amount used by these households is about 27 per cent of the total savings disposed by migrant families. Some of the important uses of remittances were for repaying loans, marriages, purchase of consumer durables, purchase and improvement of landed property, gifts and donations, purchase of ornaments, education and medical treatment (Nair, 1994:110). Another study conducted in Trichur district in Kerala revealed that 52 per cent of the income from the Gulf was used on consumption expenditure (Agro-economic Research Centre, 1982:452). Yet another study conducted in 1977 in two villages in Trivandrum in Kerala showed that nearly three-fourths of the remittances were spent on buying land and constructing houses (Mathew and Nair, 1978:151).

Associated with Gulf migration and remittances is the increasing cost of living in Kerala (Gulati, 1983:13; Mahadevan and Sumamgala, 1987:40). The cost of land is one item that has become exceptionally high. According to a study conducted in the early 1980s, the high demand for land pushed the prices of housing plots to about 10-20 times higher within a short span of five years (Mathunny 1984 quoted in Gopikuttan 1990:2084). Expensive marriages and the practice of giving a high dowry are other aspects of the increased cost of living. Although a large sum of money has poured into the state since the 1970s from the Gulf countries, its effect on industrial growth was small. No visible improvements are noted in employment levels and industrial growth. In fact, the per capita net domestic product during 1970-1986 has improved only marginally, from Rs.596 to Rs.614.

Table 2.9: Use of remittances by the households, Kerala, 1992-93

Property acquired by the household from the remittances	Per cent
Land	40.6
House	58.3
Shop/business	4.0
Car/van	0.6
Gold/jewellery	30.3
Other	19.4
Total	175

Source: PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:193.

To sum up, the Gulf migration improved the living standards of people in Kerala. As far as the present research is concerned, the Gulf migration provided ample opportunities for the scheduled castes to improve their social and economic position, although they themselves were not involved in the migration.

2.8 Social development in Kerala

2.8.1 Education

In almost any discussion on Kerala, demographic or otherwise, literacy achievements do not go unmentioned. How did Kerala achieve and maintain an appreciable level of literacy? Kerala's literacy achievements are considered to be

related to its culture and to European missionaries (Eapen, 1985; Zachariah, 1997:98; Mendelsohn and Vicziany, 1998:168). Before the British colonial annexation of the Malabar region, Malabar had several traditional schools often associated with Namboodiri *illum* or Nair *tharavard*. These schools were created by upper-caste Hindus, presumably for their own advantage. They include institutions such as Salais[22], Sabha Mutts[23], Patasala[24], Kalaries[25] and Gokulam[26]. Similar institutions were found in Travancore (Jeffrey, 1994:68) and Cochin regions as well.

Under British rule, the number of schools directly managed by government and by others[27] increased significantly. The role of the German Basel Evangelical Mission was particularly important in the spread of Western education in the Malabar region. The Germans opened a primary school in Kallayi (in Malpuram district) in 1848 (Eapen, 1985:55). In March 1926, there were 3,528 educational institutions[28] in Malabar district alone (*Madras District Gazetteers,* 1933:109). It is important to mention here that during the period 1930-31 under the Labour Department, there were 39 elementary schools for the scheduled castes in Calicut, Palghat, Chriakkal and Kurumbranad *thalukas* (a part of a district) in Malabar.

In the Travancore region, the role of Christian missionaries in developing an educational culture was vital for the spread of education in Kerala. Travancore, which was under native rule, declared state (government) support for education in 1817. It was during this time that the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) opened its first school in Alleppey. By 1821 the CMS under the leadership of Norton had established seven schools (Eapen, 1985:57). Norton's contribution is particularly important from the point of view that he created schools for various castes. By 1916, after 100 years of CMS work, 307 schools were established in the Travancore-Cochin area. Fearing the potential threat of the missionaries' English-language education the local rulers established as many Malayalam (local language) schools as they could. The number of schools in the government sector in 1894 was 225, and government aided schools 1,388. But lower-caste persons were largely excluded from these benefits as low-caste members were not permitted to study in

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[22]Vedic institutions for the study of grammar, technology, philosophy, law etc. Admission was restricted to Brahmin children.
[23]Residential schools for Namboodiri youths. Vedas, Sastras, Sanskrit and science were taught.
[24]Writing, arithmetic, the Kavyas and a smattering of astronomy and astrology were taught to upper-caste children in these village schools.
[25]Physical training was the main theme of these centres.
[26]Centres of higher learning
[27]This includes municipal, local funded, aided, unaided categories.
[28]Institutional categories are colleges, secondary schools, elementary schools, training schools, special colleges and oriental colleges.

government schools (Jeffrey, 1994:73). In 1894-1895, Travancore began a small programme of grants for low-caste children. In Travancore primary education in Malayalam was made mandatory in 1902. In 1911-1912 caste restrictions in schools were formally abolished in Travancore, while in Cochin state, mandated free education in Malayalam began in 1908.

The relative backwardness of scheduled castes and backward castes in education in the traditional caste system is reflected in Table 2.10. The table reveals that education at the time was restricted to upper-caste people. In all three regions—Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar—the literacy rate of the Pulayas (scheduled caste) was less than 6 per cent in 1931, while the Brahmins had a literacy rate of more than 50 per cent in all three regions.

Table 2.10: Literacy rates for selected castes, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, 1931

Caste/Religion	Travancore	Cochin	Malabar
Brahmin	50.9	68.0	57.0
Nair	35.5	55.7	37.4
Ezava	21.3	26.2	NA
Pulaya[a]	3.3	5.3	1.9

Note: [a]One of the numerically important scheduled-caste communities in Kerala.
Source: Sivanandan, 1979:476.

Christian missionaries' efforts to improve the educational levels of Kerala, and of the lower castes in particular, had several consequences in the overall educational progress in the state. For example, when the missionaries began schools for the lower castes and encouraged them to attend, the local rulers feared the educational progress of the lower castes. These fears and competition generated a feeling that education can improve both social and economic status. Thus, during the early twentieth century a genuine belief in the value of education pervaded in Malayali (people of Kerala) attitudes. By the mid-1950s, awareness of the importance of education had spread to every corner of Kerala:

> The Investigator asked a small number of villagers what their object was in sending their children to school. The common reply was 'to acquire knowledge'. And knowledge, they believed, is good; a person without education is a beast. Most of the villagers are too poor to educate their children to the standard required for jobs, yet they send their children to school in the sincere belief that schooling is good (Aiyappan, 1965:95).

Table 2.11 reveals that Kerala had consistently higher literacy than India. In 1961 the total literacy rate for Kerala was 47 per cent, while for India as a whole it was 24 per cent. While both Kerala and India progressed significantly after that, the gap in literacy between Kerala and India remained. The changes in female literacy have been particularly interesting. In 1961 Kerala's female literacy rate was 39 per cent and that of India as a whole was 13. Even in 1991, India's female literacy was less than half that of Kerala. Evidence suggests that literacy in Kerala has been higher than in India ever since Christian missionaries started working in Kerala. Reports suggest that in Malabar district 20 per cent of males and 5 per cent of females were literate even in 1921 (*Madras District Gazettes*, 1933:108). In Travancore, the 1875 census revealed a total literacy rate of 5.74. Literacy levels of the scheduled castes in Kerala, however, have been lower than that of the general population, particularly during the traditional caste system.

Table 2.11: Percentage literate among total and female populations, Kerala, SCs, and India, 1961-1991

State/ Country	1961[a]		1971[a]		1981[b]		1991[b]	
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
Kerala, All	47	39	60	54	69	65	90	87
India, All	24	13	30	19	36	25	52	39

Notes: Figures given are for all ages. T= total; F= female; SC=Scheduled Castes; [a]Based on 5+ population; [b]Based on 7+ population.
Sources: Superiendent of Census Operations, 1967:156,176; Director of Census Operations 1971:44; Census of India, 1981:280; Director of Census Operations, 1981:288-89; Director of Census Operations, 1991.

When Kerala state was formed in 1956, it possessed a reasonably good educational infrastructure and popular support for education. After 1956, education became the responsibility of the state government, although the Central government is expected to lay down broad policies and co-ordinate state activities. Since education has been a state responsibility, the nature of its growth and structure has been significantly

influenced by state policies and actions (Kuttikrishnan, 1994:350). In Kerala education has been encouraged and all governments have continued to spend relatively large shares of the budget on it. In 1985-86, nearly 40 per cent of the total development expenditure was spent on education. By 1987-88 the educational expenditure in the state had grown 23 times from the level of 1960-61. Furthermore, Kerala paid the most serious attention to school education compared to higher education. In 1987-88, 81.3 per cent of money for education was spent on school education. Within school education, primary education was allocated 52.16 per cent of the total educational expenditure in 1987-88.

Table 2.12: Per capita expenditure on education, Kerala and India, 1960-1988

Year	Per capita expenditure	
	Kerala (Rs)	India (Rs)
1960-61	10.90	6.31
1970-71	28.00	15.00
1980-81	85.00	47.00
1985-86	167.00	102.00
1987-88	207.00	136.0

Source: Kuttikrishnan, 1994:351.

Democratisation of education was yet another consideration of various governments in Kerala (Kuttikrishnan, 1994:356). In tertiary educational institutions, 15 per cent of seats were reserved for scheduled castes after Independence. In addition, they were given a concession of 5 per cent of marks in the minimum percentage required for admission to any course. Educational concessions were also given to scheduled-caste students. For example, scheduled-caste students could obtain a lump sum grant to cover costs of text books, stationery and clothing (Santhakumari, n.d.:12). While such provisions were laid down by the Central government, these were applicable to all states as guidelines or principles. The question, then, was implementation. In Kerala, progress in the literacy levels of the lower castes, compared to that of scheduled castes in other states, indicates that some of these schemes were implemented in a timely manner.

Involvement of the private sector in education has been yet another way for fast expansion of educational institutions in Kerala. In 1984, 60 per cent of the schools and 80 per cent of the colleges were under private management.

The Kerala Peoples' Science Movement (KPSM), a left-wing organisation, formed in 1963, also made a significant contribution towards improving adult literacy in the state, particularly that of the poor and disadvantaged. During the 1970s, the Movement set up study classes, medical camps, and literacy programmes in villages (Franke and Chasin, 1989:52). Volunteers were the key component of the Kerala Literacy Mission which has been a part of the KPSM.

Although literacy levels in Kerala have been higher than the all-India average, the proportion of those who matriculated or had higher levels of education has not been higher in Kerala. For example, of those who were literate in 1981 in Kerala, only about 14 per cent had high school education or above compared to 20 per cent in India. Furthermore, the percentage of those who had graduation or above in Kerala was only half of the all-India average.

Table 2.13: Educational levels of literate population in Kerala, 1961-1981 and India 1981

Level of education	1961 Kerala	1981 Kerala	1981 India
Without formal education	68.09	28.85	30.8
Primary	25.56	32.49	31.5
Middle	--	24.39	17.6
Matriculation/higher secondary	6.34	11.05	15.7
Graduate and above	--	1.96	3.9
Certificate holders	--	1.24	0.5

Source: Kuttikrishnan, 1994:362.

The evidence provided above on Kerala's education suggests the following. First, education was encouraged in Kerala by the Christians and by the local Rajas, although their objectives were different. Secondly, contrary to the popular feeling that Kerala is educationally advanced, Kerala is not better than India when we look at the levels of education of those who are educated, suggesting that Kerala could be better referred to as a 'literate state' than an 'educated state'. In Kerala primary level education is distributed more equally than the Indian average; this makes education in Kerala different from the rest of the country. Thirdly, the educational status of the scheduled castes has improved to the general literacy level of caste Hindus in the

present decade. Furthermore, literacy levels of the scheduled castes of Kerala have been much higher than the all-India average literacy levels from at least the 1950s.

2.8.2. Health facilities

Educational attainment is not the only aspect in which Kerala excels. Health care is also a high priority. Public health-care initiatives in Kerala have a long history. For example, in the nineteenth century native rulers of Travancore and Cochin took an active part in public health programmes (Nayar, 1986:163). They enforced sanitary measures in temples, markets, and other public places and developed a paramedical public-health and sanitation infrastructure in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1865 the Maharaja of Travancore opened a hospital in Trivandrum that offered free treatment to everyone.

Distribution of health services is another striking feature of Kerala's health-care system: this is evident from Tables 2.14 and 2.15. In 1988, about 56 per cent of the total hospital beds in Kerala were distributed in rural areas compared to just 18 per cent for India as a whole. The Kerala NFHS revealed that about 98 per cent of the surveyed villages contained at least one health facility, and about 90 per cent of the population had a hospital within 10 kilometres (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:184).

Table 2.14: Health facilities, Kerala, 1992-93

Distance to facility	PH C	SC	Either PHC/SC	Hospital	Dispensary/ clinic	Any health facility
Within the village	82.7	92.1	96.2	66.4	87.4	98.2
<5 km	2.6	0.8	0.8	4.3	9.6	1.8
5-9 km	8.8	3.6	1.8	18.9	0.9	--
10+	3.2	0.3	--	9.3	1.0	--
Do not know	2.7	3.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	--
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes: PHC is primary health centre and SC is primary sub-centre.
Source: PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:184.

Since the per capita expenditure on health for Kerala from the Central government is not very different from that spent nationally, the involvement of the private sector seems to be significant in Kerala. In 1988, about 60 per cent of hospital beds in Kerala were in the private sector compared to 29 per cent in India as a whole. The percentage of hospitals in the private sector in Kerala was 92, compared to 56 per cent for India.

Table 2.15: Hospital beds and expenditure on health, Kerala and India, 1988

State/ Country	Hospital beds per 1000 population	Percentage of beds in rural areas	Percentage of Government owned:		Per capita expenditure on Health[a]
			Hospitals	Beds	
Kerala	259	56	8	40	47
India	77	18	44	71	42

Note: [a]Average annual government expenditure in rupees for 1983-88.
Source: Bhat and Rajan, 1997:47.

Infrastructure and availability of services do not necessarily translate into optimal use of services. One of the important features of the public health care system in Kerala has been the regular attendance of doctors, nurses and other staff. Observers believe that demand from the people has been the fundamental reason for this. As Mencher (1980) pointed out, the success of health programmes in Kerala is primarily because of the awareness of people of Kerala about their rights to health care. Mencher (1980), who observed government Primary Health Centres in Kerala and the neighbouring state, Tamil Nadu, reported of the public demand for health services:

> There is no question that politicisation of people in Kerala has played a major part in affecting people's health..... In Tamil Nadu (Kerala's neighbouring state), more than half the times I visited a primary health centre one doctor was on leave, another was attending a conference, or one doctor was off on some training programme, or had gone to see his or her sick mother, etc. This was not the case in Kerala. When I visited a primary health centre in Kerala, I normally found two doctors assigned to the post there hard at work and people waiting in a queue for treatment..... if a PHC was unmanned for a few days, there would be a massive demonstration at the nearest collectorate led by local leftists, who would demand to be given what they knew were entitled to. This has had the effect of making health care much more readily available for the poor in Kerala (Mencher, 1980:1782).

Franke and Chasin (1989) discussed in great detail how the present health system has managed to meet the health needs of poor people in Kerala. They argue that Kerala's health care is the result of popular demand and that government is compelled to meet such demands:

> In Kerala, health care is a right. Ordinary people have struggled for it. They expect it. They demand it. They continue to struggle to maintain, expand, and improve it (Franke and Chasin, 1989).

2.8.3. Mortality decline

The ready availability of health care is reflected in Kerala's low mortality[29] (Panikar and Soman, 1984). The crude death rate (CDR) of Kerala declined from around 25 per thousand population in 1940 to around 6 per thousand population in 1988-92, while the CDR in India declined from 31 per thousand population to 12 per thousand population during the same period. Thus, Kerala's mortality decline has been faster and steeper than that observed for India. The decline in infant mortality is yet another impressive achievement in Kerala compared to India. The infant mortality rate (IMR) in Kerala which stood at 242 per thousand live births during the period 1911-1920 declined to 66 per thousand in the period 1961-71 (Rajan and Zachariah, 1998:44). The IMR has further dropped to 14 in 1996 compared to 72 for India (SRS, 1998).

Expectation of life is yet another indicator associated with the decreased mortality in Kerala. For example, the male expectation of life at birth has increased from 44.3 to 73 years between the periods 1951-61 and 1991-96. For females the corresponding figures were 45.3 to 79 years (Rajan and Zachariah, 1998:48). In other parts of India, female life expectancy is lower than male life expectancy.

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[29] According to Panikar and Soman (1984), high morbidity and low mortality co-existed in Kerala.

Table 2.16: Crude death rate (CDR) and infant mortality rate (IMR), Kerala and India, 1940-1992

Year	CDR		IMR	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
1940	25.0	31.2	-	161
1951-61[a]	19.7	28.2	74[c]	112[c]
1961-71[a]	12.2	20.8	61[c]	122[c]
1971-81[a]	8.6	15.2	-	-
1971-75[b]	8.6	15.5	57	134
1976-80[b]	7.3	13.9	46	124
1981-85[b]	6.6	12.1	32	104
1986-90[b]	6.1	-	24.2	91.2
1988-92[b]	6.0	-	19.8	

Note: [a]Census analysis; [b]SRS estimates.
Source: [c]Gulati, 1976:1227; Bhat and Rajan, 1997:38.

Table 2.17 shows the Infant Mortality Rate for various religion/caste groups in Kerala. In 1979 scheduled castes had the poorest health status in Kerala: their IMR was twice the Kerala average. Compared to the all-India average, however, the IMR for the scheduled castes was about 44 per cent lower.

Table 2.17: Infant mortality for various religious/caste groups in Kerala, 1979, 1992-93

Religion/ Caste	1979		1992-93[a]	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
Hindu	45	138	23	90.4
Muslims	43	126	43.9	76.6
Christians	27	--	27.7	49.9
Scheduled caste	85	152	--	107.3
Scheduled tribe	--	120	--	90.5
All	42	136	31	86.3

Note: [a]Based on births in the 10 years preceding the survey.
Source: Bhat and Rajan, 1997:44; IIPS, 1995:215.

2.8.4. Population and family welfare programme

Kerala's success in family planning is well known, and is reflected in fertility levels since its implementation with the clinical[30] approach in 1951. Since the government family planning programmes have been provided through health facilities (primary health centres, sub-centres, and clinics), the distribution of family planning service outlets is well distributed across rural and urban areas. As the family planning programme is a Central government programme, the inputs in manpower and other resources have been similar to those of the rest of the country. However, its implementation has been more efficient than in other parts of the country. The extension[31] approach was adopted by the national family planning programme in 1963-64. Several camps were organised during the period 1970-73 (Mahadevan *et al*, 1989:203). The famous tubectomy camp of Ernakulam organised in 1971 was one of the largest camps ever conducted in India, with a total of 62,913 tubectomies performed in just one month.

An integrated approach to family planning was adopted during the period 1974-77. The expanded immunisation programme was introduced in 1978 to provide vaccination for all eligible children and mothers. The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) programme was included in the Family Planning (FP) Programme in 1978 and a new name, Family Welfare Programme, introduced to show the programme's overall objectives beyond just family planning (Saseendran, 1993:1).

The Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) was introduced in 1985-86 with the aim of expanding to all areas for the entire population. The Family Planning programme of India has been voluntary. Although sterilisation is the most popular family planning method, other spacing methods such as IUDs, condoms, and pills are available under a cafeteria approach. The demographic aim of the programme is to achieve a net reproduction rate (NRR) of 1.0 by 2011-2016. It may be noted here that Kerala state had already reached a replacement level of fertility of 2.1 children per woman in early 1990 (Rajan and Zachariah, 1998:1)

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[30]People were expected to go family planning clinics to receive family planning services.
[31]Aimed at providing family planning message and service through a network of Primary Health Centres and sub-Centres in rural areas and through urban centres and family welfare training centres (Srinivasan, 1995:33).

2.9 Economic change in Kerala

While social development has been rapid, Kerala is rated as an economically backward state[32] (United Nations, 1975:7; Ratcliffe, 1978:124; Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:55; Basu, 1986:274; Nag, 1989:152; Isaac and Tharakan, 1995). Kerala's per capita income in 1960-61 was Rs 259 against the national average of Rs 306, around 15 per cent less than the Indian average. During the 1980s, the gap in per capita income between India and Kerala increased, and in 1986, Kerala stood about 37 per cent lower in per capita income than India (Franke and Chasin, 1989). In fact, during the 1980s the per capita income of Kerala recorded a decline of 0.1 per cent, while India recorded an increase of 3 per cent (PRC, Thiruvanthapuram and IIPS, 1995:5). Thus, Kerala's domestic economy has been slowing. The following paragraphs examine some of the specific features of Kerala's economy.

Closely related to the poor economy in Kerala is the poor development of industrialisation. With poor expansion in industry, the state is considered industrially backward (Mohan, 1994:218; Pillai, 1994:259; Sankaranarayanan and Bhai, 1994:299). Evidence suggests that industrial development initiatives in Kerala began as early as 1881 when an American opened a factory to make clothes in Quilon (Sankaranarayanan and Bhai, 1994:299). However, for some reason, industry did not grow the way the educational and health sectors did. Among the registered factories in India, Kerala's share was only 3 per cent in 1987-88, less than the state's share of population. The Central Industrial Investment (CII) in Kerala seems to have diminished since the 1980s. In 1988, CII investment in Kerala was just 1.59 per cent, nearly half of its entitlement with regard to population size and much lower than its share in 1975. Political reasons are often put forward for this decline in Central government assistance to Kerala. Similarly, the state's commitment to the social sector is one reason for less investment in the industrial sector. According to Namboodiripad (1968:9), a prominent communist leader and ex-chief minister of Kerala, the earlier expansion in education, medical and health services and road construction absorbed part of the labour force which otherwise would have been employed in modern industries, and resulted in the limited expansion of industry. Scholars also believe that the political climate and unsound development policies are responsible for the poor economic performance of Kerala (Prakash, 1994:36). Mohan (1994:235) argues that the era of militant trade unionism

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[32]During the peak remittance period the share of remittances could be as high as a quarter of the state's domestic product. A paper presented at the AKG centre-sponsored International Congress on Kerala Studies indicated that with the inclusion of remittances from the Middle East, per capita income in Kerala could be higher than the national average (Isaac and Tharakan, 1995:1996).

is on the decline, but unfortunately it seems that labour unrest remains a stigma that makes private investors shy away from the state. Poor industrialisation in the state has had adverse effects on its educated population: educated men and women leave the state as there are few opportunities for work.

Table 2.18: Central industrial investment in Kerala (Rs.crore), 1970-1988

Year	Kerala	All India	Percentage
1970	116	3,885	2.99
1975	202	6,242	3.24
1980	423	18,161	2.33
1985	831	47,323	1.76
1986	923	56,806	1.62
1987	1,074	68,119	1.58
1988	1,307	82,150	1.59

Source: Mohan, 1994:227.

The poor agricultural production of Kerala is revealed by the importation of food grains and the shrinking of agricultural land. Despite the higher return per acre compared to other states, the deficiency in meeting food requirements was nearly 50 per cent in Kerala during the early 1960s (Kurup *et al.*, 1965:3; Namboodiripad, 1968:4)). In 1991 about three decades later, about 80 per cent of the food grain requirement of Kerala was met though imports from other parts of India (Prakash, 1994:18-19). It is important to note here that there has been a massive conversion of rice[33] fields to coconut plantations and other cash crops which require less labour. Thus, agriculture, particularly rice production, could not cope with the growing population. Kerala, therefore, is not self-sufficient in food production (Radhakrishnan *et al.*, 1994:160). Low per capita land availability (Kurup *et al.*, 1965:3), the conversion of agricultural land into housing plots, a labour shortage, and an increase in wages are some possible reasons for the stagnation of agriculture, apart from the technical and climatic factors (Sivanandan, 1994).

[33]Rice is the staple food of Kerala.

During 1975-1983 the percentage growth rate of the area under rice cultivation was -1.54. This decline is significant considering the fact that rice accounts for about 23 per cent of the gross cropped area and about 95 per cent of the total area under food crops in Kerala during the period 1981-82 (Sivanandan, 1994:150; Radhakrishnan *et al.*, 1994:160). The area under cultivation as well as production of rice in Kerala showed a generally rising trend until about the mid-1970s, and thereafter a declining trend. The rate of decline has been steeper in the area used for agriculture production. Productivity on the other hand has shown a rising trend throughout. Thus, the declining trend in production has been due to a decline in land areas under cultivation (Radhakrishnan *et al.*, 1994).

Another measure of the economic situation of the state is the unemployment figures. According to a survey conducted in 1987, about 40 per cent of the labour force was unemployed. This included about 26 per cent who had not worked a single day during the reference year, and about 14 per cent who had worked at least one day but less than 183 days in a year (Prakash, 1994:23).

Despite its dismal economic growth, Kerala has shown remarkable progress in poverty alleviation[34]. The proportion of rural poor declined from around 60 per cent in 1957-58 to 17 per cent in 1987-88. In contrast, during the same period the percentage of rural poor in India dropped only to 30 per cent from 53.4 per cent. What Kerala has demonstrated then is that decline in poverty is not totally a function of the economic performance of the state. In Kerala it happened under the combined effect of land reform, Gulf migration and other social and economic changes.

[34]For a detailed analysis of poverty in Kerala see Mohanadas (1994).

Table 2.19: Proportion of rural poor, Kerala and India, 1957-1988.

Year	Kerala	All India
1957-58	59.6	53.4
1959-60	62.3	48.7
1960-61	57.8	42.0
1961-62	50.3	42.3
1963-64	52.8	49.1
1964-65	60.7	50.4
1965-66	70.7	51.1
1966-67	67.1	57.4
1967-68	63.4	57.9
1968-69	64.6	53.5
1970-71	62.0	49.1
1973-74	49.3	47.6
1977-78	47.37	51.2
1983-84	26.05	40.4
1987-88	17	30

Source: Mohanadas 1994:88; PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:5

Although Gulf migration, social development, and social justice could be achieved in Kerala on a large scale, there is no corresponding progress in industrial development or agriculture production in the state. Kerala's economic base is the remittances from Gulf countries and other states of India. Without domestic economic development, the economy of Kerala will be fragile lending less impetus for future economic growth and social development. Although the lower castes benefited from the economic boom and subsequent changes in the labour market in Kerala, sustainable progress can be achieved only if the economic boom is translated to more stable growth.

2.10 Conclusion

One of the important conclusions of the present chapter is that there has been a transition in the social and economic organisation of Kerala society: from a traditional caste system society to a non-traditional caste system, one in which caste plays a much smaller role. The causes of this transition include the work of Christian missionaries, the efforts of lower-caste reformers, land reform, and the Gulf migration. All these forces have worked in a sequence where each reinforced the other. For example, had there been no Gulf migration following the land reform, the effect of land reform on lower-caste welfare might not have been so significant. Thus, what happened in Kerala is unique to its social, political and economic setting. The same forces may not have the same impact on the caste system in other parts of the country. The social developments achieved in Kerala are mostly the offshoots of the same forces that caused caste-system changes or were produced by caste-system changes. Thus, the caste-system changes and social development need to be viewed as complementary. Much of the success in achieving social development in Kerala is because of the empowering of lower-caste people in Kerala: the lower castes could ascertain their rights. For the rest of India, empowering the lower castes by removing the traditional caste system could improve social development, a way to fertility decline. In the next chapter, the fertility of Kerala, particularly the scheduled-caste fertility, is examined in the context of the social and economic changes discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 3

Fertility Transition in Kerala: Scheduled Caste and Non-Scheduled Caste Fertility Turnaround

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed Kerala in terms of macro-institutional environment. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the fertility changes and explanations for those changes in Kerala in recent decades. Explanations for fertility change will be examined in the context of the institutional environment outlined in Chapter 2. The chapter also examines the changes in the fertility of the scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes. A synthesis of various explanations for fertility change in Kerala is undertaken in the light of the fertility theories discussed in Chapter 1. Finally, consideration is given to lessons from the available literature which could explain the fertility change in the scheduled castes.

3.2 Fertility transition in Kerala

Fertility and mortality in Kerala have fallen in Kerala substantially in the second half of the twentieth century. Before the 1960s no significant fertility decline took place, as indicated by the unchanged crude birth rate (CBR) shown in Table 3.1. Compared to India, both the pace and the magnitude of fertility decline in Kerala have been notably greater since the 1960s. Table 3.1 indicates that the CBR of Kerala dropped by half during the period 1960-1997, while for India the CBR declined by slightly over one-third during the same period. The total fertility rate (TFR) of Kerala declined by about 10 per cent between 1951-60 and 1961-70, 32 per cent between 1961-70 and 1971-1981, and 41 per cent from 1971-80 to 1992-93. The corresponding changes in India were 4.7 per cent, 13 per cent, and 35 per

cent. Clearly Kerala has been one of the low-fertility[1] states in India from at least the 1960s (Srinivasan, 1995:86-87, 245). The significant decline in fertility since the 1960s is closely linked to the transformation of Kerala to a non-traditional caste-system society.

Decline in mortality in Kerala occurred before fertility started to decline substantially. As revealed in Table 3.1 Kerala had substantially lower crude birth rates than the all-India average. The crude death rate for Kerala in 1997 stood at 6.2 per thousand population, compared to 8.9 per thousand population in India.

Table 3.1: Trends in CBR, TFR and CDR for Kerala and India, 1931-1992

Year	CBR		TFR		CDR	
	Kerala	India	Kerala	India	Kerala	India
1931-40[c]	40.0[a]	45.0	–	–	25.0	31.2
1941-50[c]	40.0[b]	40.0	–	–	20.0	27.4
1951-60[c]	39.0	42.0	5.6	6.3	16.1	22.8
1961-70[c]	37.0	41.0	5.0	6.0	13.5	19.0
1971-81[d]	28.1	37.2	3.4	5.2	8.6	15.2
1990-92[e]	19.6	28.7	2.0	3.4	6.2	10.0
1997[f]	17.9	27.2	–	–	6.2	8.9

Notes: [a]Travancore state; [b]Travancore and Cochin; [c]Based on publications of Registrar General of India, including Sample Registration System Bulletins; [d]Based on Census analysis, [e]based on NFHS, [f]based on SRS estimates (provisional); – indicates not available.
Sources: For CBR and CDR [c]Srinivasan, 1995:241; [d]Bhat and Rajan, 1997:54; [e]IIPS, 1995:96,206; [f]SRS, 1998:1; For TFR [c,d]Bhat and Rajan, 1997:54; [e]IIPS, 1995:96.

As shown in Table 3.2, the changes in Kerala's fertility have taken a long time to bring down its population growth. During the period 1901-1991, Kerala's population more than quadrupled while India's population only tripled. Table 3.2 shows that Kerala's population grew faster than India's until 1971, but more slowly since then. The growth of Kerala's population in the mid-twentieth century seems to have had significant effects on the land needed for cultivation and housing as the density of population was high. High population growth and the tenancy system in Kerala had pushed the lower castes to extreme economic hardships which resulted in peasant struggles (Menon, 1994).

[1]The marital fertility rate was higher in Kerala than the Indian average and started declining from 1966 (Srinivasan, 1995:241). For example, the marital fertility was 242.38 for Kerala compared to 211.36 for all India (rural) during the period 1958-59 (Raman, 1965:69).

It is suggested that the lower growth rate in Kerala than India since 1971 has been due to the lower fertility in Kerala[2] (Bhat and Rajan, 1997:36). A substantial fertility decline as well as decline in growth rate in Kerala since 1971 match the land reform implemented in Kerala in the 1970s. In 1991 Kerala's population was 29,098,518, which is about 3.4 per cent of India's total population (Director of Census Operations, 1991).

Table 3.2: Population growth trends, Kerala and India, 1901-91

Year	Population ('000s)	Growth rate	
	Kerala	Kerala	India
1901	6,396	–	–
1911	7,148	1.09	0.56
1921	7,802	0.90	-0.03
1931	9,507	1.98	1.04
1941	11,032	1.50	1.33
1951	13,549	2.08	1.25
1961	16,904	2.24	1.96
1971	21,347	2.26	2.20
1981	24,454	1.77	2.22
1991	29,099	1.31	2.11

Notes: Growth rates refer to the exponential growth rate since the previous date.
– indicates not available.
Source: Srinivasan, 1995:240.

Table 3.3 shows the 1992-93 NFHS data on TFRs for various states in India. According to the table, Kerala had the lowest TFR among all the Indian states, except for Goa[3]; both these states recorded below-replacement-level fertility[4]. Compared to some of the major northern states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the TFR of Kerala was substantially lower.

[2]No change in territory has taken place since 1956, i.e. since the formation of Kerala (Director of Census Operations, 1991:23).

[3]Goa was a Union Territory (directly governed by the Central Government) until 1987 (Srinivasan, 1995:228). Goa's population was only about 0.14 per cent of India's population in 1991, while Kerala's share was 3.44 per cent (Director of Census Operations, 1991). The conditions under which fertility declined in Goa were significantly different from those in Kerala, especially with regard to income levels (Srinivasan, 1995).

[4]A TFR of 2.1 is a reasonably close approximation of replacement-level fertility for a population of low mortality: one in which the probability of survival from birth to the reproductive ages is nearly 1.0 (Demeny, 1995:2).

Although Kerala's TFR was lower than the TFR of southern states, the difference was smaller than the difference between the TFR in Kerala and the TFR in the northern states of India. For example, Tamil Nadu, a neighbouring state of Kerala, had about 24 per cent higher TFR, while Uttar Pradesh, a northern state, had 141 per cent higher TFR than Kerala (IIPS, 1995).

Table 3.3: Total fertility rate for various Indian states and percentage variation from the Kerala TFR, 1992-93

County/State	TFR (Total)	Per cent variation from the TFR of Kerala
India	*3.39*	*+ 69.5*
Goa	1.90	- 5.0
Assam	3.53	+ 76.5
Orissa	2.92	+ 46.0
West Bengal	2.92	+ 46.0
Madhya Pradesh	3.90	+ 95.0
Delhi	3.02	+ 51.0
Rajasthan	3.63	+ 81.5
Punjab	2.91	+ 45.5
Haryana	3.99	+ 99.5
Uttar Pradesh	4.82	+ 141.0
Tamil Nadu	2.48	+ 24.0
Karnataka	2.85	+ 42.5
Maharashtra	2.86	+ 43.0
Himachal Pradesh	2.97	+ 48.5
Gujarat	2.99	+ 49.5
Andhra Pradesh	2.59	+ 29.5
Bihar	4.00	+ 100.0
Kerala (Base value)	*2.00*	

Source: IIPS, 1995.

Since the trends to lower fertility and mortality are so general, the state-by-state differences can also be expressed by the number of years each state is behind Kerala. Some of the key demographic variables in this method are shown in Table 3.4. In 1997, for example, regarding the crude birth rate, the major states of India lag between three and over 25 years behind Kerala. Much larger lags in years are

found for all other indicators. The state that shows the lowest time lag concerning all indicators, except for the infant mortality rate (IMR), is Kerala's neighbouring state, Tamil Nadu. States that show the highest variation from Kerala are highly populated northern states such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan.

Table 3.4: Time lag (in years) of other states behind Kerala in selected demographic and health parameters, 1997

State	Demographic variables and lag period in years from Kerala					
	CBR	CDR	IMR	TFR	Male age at marriage	Female age at marriage
Andhra Pradesh	11	21	29	25	>80	>80
Assam	22	25	30	30	na	na
Bihar	25	27	30	>50	>80	>25
Gujarat	18	19	29	18	>80	40
Haryana	22	21	29	30	>80	50
Karnataka	10	19	27	14	30	40
Madhya Pradesh	25	25	>30	30	>80	>80
Maharashtra	13	18	20	14	60	50
Orissa	15	25	>30	28	60	40
Punjab	12	19	19	14	60	10
Rajasthan	25	24	>30	>50	>80	>80
Tamil Nadu	2	10	27	12	20	10
Uttar Pradesh	25	25	>30	>50	>80	50
West Bengal	10	25	27	14	30	40
India	21[a]	8.9	25	28	50	50
Kerala (1997)	*17.9*	*6.2*	*12*	*2.3*	*27.2*	*21.8*

Notes: Time lags are calculated using Kerala's experience as a basis for comparison. For example Andhra Pradesh had a 1997 CBR of 22.8, a level Kerala reached in 1986, so Andhra Pradesh lags behind Kerala by 11 years in CBR; [a]Excludes Jammu and Kashmir. Value of TFR for Kerala refer to 1988; age at marriage for Kerala refers to 1981.

Sources: *Sample Registration System Bulletin* (April 1998:1); Srinivasan, 1995:124, 241.

To sum up, the evidence presented in this section clearly suggests that Kerala is one of the lowest fertility and mortality states in India. In terms of the demographic transition theory, Kerala falls in the last phase where fertility and mortality are low. More significantly, Kerala's fertility levels in the 1990s are indicative of below-replacement fertility. Furthermore, Kerala has already achieved the demographic goals set by India to be achieved by the year 2015. The timing and pace of fertility transition in Kerala and the pace of its caste-system changes appear to be similar, suggesting a possible link between them.

3.3 Turnaround in scheduled castes' and non-scheduled castes' fertility

Kerala, besides being one of the lowest-fertility states in India, also shows the lowest fertility for the scheduled castes among all the Indian states. The fertility of scheduled castes and 'total population' of various states in India as revealed in the 1992-93 NFHS is displayed in Table 3.5. While Kerala scheduled castes had a TFR of 1.37 children per woman, the state of Uttar Pradesh had a TFR of 5.56, the highest among all the Indian states in the 1992-93 NFHS.

Another striking feature of the fertility of Kerala is its lower TFR recorded for the scheduled-caste communities compared to the total population. In fact Kerala was the only state, except for Assam and Bihar[5], in India that shows lower fertility for the scheduled castes than for the total population. While in Kerala the TFR of the scheduled castes was 32 per cent lower than that of the total population, it was about 99 per cent higher in Goa, the state which has the lowest fertility of all Indian states. Considering the below-replacement-level fertility of the total population in Kerala, the still lower fertility of the scheduled castes poses an important question: why is scheduled caste fertility lower than the fertility of the total population in Kerala? As will be shown in later this chapter, no study has been conducted to answer this question.

[5]Bihar shows the fertility of its scheduled castes slightly below the overall value (1%). But it important to note that Bihar has substantially higher fertility than Kerala.

Table 3.5: TFR for the total population and scheduled-caste population for major Indian states, 1992-93

County/State	TFR (SC)[a]	TFR (Total)[b]	Per cent variation from TFR of total population
India	*3.90*	*3.39*	*+15*
Goa	3.78	1.90	+ 99
Orissa	3.68	2.92	+ 26
West Bengal	3.52	2.92	+ 21
Madhya Pradesh	4.71	3.90	+ 21
Delhi	3.62	3.02	+ 20
Rajasthan	4.26	3.63	+ 17
Punjab	3.39	2.91	+ 16
Haryana	4.61	3.99	+ 16
Uttar Pradesh	5.56	4.82	+ 15
Tamil Nadu	2.79	2.48	+ 13
Karnataka	3.15	2.85	+ 11
Maharashtra	3.04	2.86	+ 6
Himachal Pradesh	3.10	2.97	+ 4
Andhra Pradesh	2.61	2.59	+ <1
Gujarat	2.98	2.99	–
Bihar	3.95	4.00	– 1
Assam	2.77	3.53	– 22
Kerala	*1.37*	*2.00*	*–32*

Notes: – indicate no notable difference; [a]Scheduled castes; [b]Total population.
Sources: National Family and Health Survey, 1992-93: various volumes.

Since the fertility of the scheduled castes was considerably lower than that of the total population in Kerala, it is interesting to examine whether the scheduled castes had lower fertility than the non-scheduled caste Hindus. Data which permit such an assessment are not abundant. However, one of the studies conducted in Kerala by Kerala University during the period 1963-64, covering 534 married women aged 20-39 in rural areas of Trivandrum, does address this issue. This revealed that the average number of children ever born was significantly higher among the scheduled castes than the non-scheduled caste Hindus (see Table 3.6). For example, the fertility (children ever born for women aged 35-39) of the upper-caste Nairs was about 29 per cent lower than that of the scheduled castes. Similarly, the Ezavas, a

caste higher in social status than the scheduled castes, had a fertility about 12 per cent lower than that of the scheduled castes. In brief, in 1963-64 except for the Muslims, the scheduled castes had the highest fertility (George, 1976:4).

Table 3.6: Average number of live births for various caste or religious groups, 1963-64 in rural Trivandrum, Kerala

Religion/ Caste	Age group (years)			
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39
Nairs	1.63	3.14	4.40	5.11
Ezavas	1.58	3.26	4.45	6.29
Scheduled castes	2.15	3.59	4.68	7.16
Christians	2.09	3.42	4.36	4.52
Muslims	–	3.00	6.00	8.00

Note: – indicates very few cases.
Source: George, 1976:4.

Fertility data from two World Bank Fertility Surveys (WBFS) conducted in selected districts[6] of Kerala also provide results by caste and are given in Table 3.7. The results suggest that the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes[7] had the highest marital fertility in the two surveys during the periods 1965-70 and 1975-80. The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes had about 31 per cent higher fertility than the Nairs. This difference reduced to about 9 per cent during 1975-80. During the period 1965-70 to 1970-80, Nair fertility declined by only about 14 per cent while scheduled castes and scheduled tribes registered a 28 per cent decline. The conclusion of the analysis in this paragraph is that not only that the fertility of the scheduled castes had declined during the period 1965-70 to 1975-80, but also that it had declined faster than that of the Nairs. Furthermore, as a result of greater pace in the fertility decline among the scheduled castes, the difference in the fertility between Nairs and scheduled castes has been reduced during the period 1975-80 compared to 1965-70 period. Why did the scheduled castes' fertility decline faster than the Nairs' fertility during the period 1965-70 to 1975-80? This is yet another question for which answers are not readily available in the literature.

[6]These districts were Palghat, Ernakulam, and Alleppey.
[7]Scheduled castes and Tribes are combined in this study. However, since scheduled tribes form so small a part of the population, the values in Table 3.7 can be regarded as those of the scheduled-caste population.

Table 3.7: Total marital fertility rate[a] for Nairs and SC/ST, World Bank Fertility Survey of selected districts in Kerala, 1965-70 and 1975-80

Caste	1965-70	1975-80	Per cent decline
Nairs	4.9	4.2	–14
Scheduled castes and scheduled tribes	6.4	4.6	–28

Note: [a]Total marital fertility is for ages 20-40 years, SC/ST scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
Source: Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:56.

Table 3.8 gives the TFRs for major religious and caste groups from the 1979 SRS Survey, the 1981 Census and the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS. According to the 1979 SRS survey of Kerala, the TFR for rural areas was 2.85 children per woman with the highest value for Muslims and the lowest value for Christians. Compared to the 'total Hindus', the scheduled castes had a higher TFR.

In 1981, the average TFR for rural Kerala was 2.52. Here again the lowest and highest fertility was for Christians and Muslims, respectively. Compared to 'total Hindus', as in the 1979 SRS survey, fertility for the scheduled castes was higher. The pattern and the level of fertility between total Hindus and the scheduled castes did not change during this time span, although the gap narrowed.

The situation revealed in the 1992-93 NFHS was totally different from the previous surveys of 1979 and 1981. The lowest fertility in the 1992-93 NFHS was not for Christians but for the scheduled castes. Compared to the total Hindus, not only was the scheduled-caste fertility lower, but substantially lower, by about 17 per cent. Why did this happen? Since the most significant change in fertility has occurred for the scheduled castes, factors that influenced the fertility behaviour of scheduled castes seem to have changed in Kerala.

Table 3.8: Total fertility rate for various caste/religious groups, Kerala 1979-1993

Caste/Religion	1979	1981	1992-93
	Rural	Rural	Rural + Urban
Hindu	2.49	2.26	1.66
Muslim	4.15	3.72	2.96
Christian	2.43	2.16	1.78
Scheduled caste	2.74	2.41	1.37
Scheduled tribe	–	3.02	1.29
All Kerala	2.85	2.52	2.00

Note: Hindus include scheduled castes; – indicates no cases.
Sources: Bhat and Rajan, 1997:58-59; PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:58.

Table 3.9 gives a broad summary view of scheduled castes' fertility as revealed in various surveys discussed earlier. Since the measures of fertility are not readily comparable, the purpose is to give a broad view of fertility change among the scheduled castes in Kerala. The conclusion that can be drawn from the table is that fertility of the scheduled castes has indeed declined to a very low level. It also indicates a gradual decline from 1965-70.

Table 3.9: Trends in scheduled-caste fertility since the 1960s, Kerala

Years	1963-64	1965-70	1975-80	1979	1981	1992-93
Fertility	7.16[a]	6.4[b]	4.6[b]	2.74[c]	2.41[c]	1.37[d]

Notes: [a]Children ever born; [b]Total marital fertility rate (scheduled caste/tribe); [c]Total fertility rate (rural); [d]Total fertility rate (total population).
Sources: Tables 3.6, 3.7, and 3.8.

To sum up, available data indicate that the scheduled castes in Kerala had much higher fertility than the total Hindus and non-scheduled-caste Hindus in the past—the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Although the gap between the fertility of scheduled-caste and total Hindus (and non-scheduled-caste Hindus) has been shrinking since the 1970s, it was only in the 1990s that a turnaround in scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste fertility was observed. This reversal is made evident in Table 3.10.

As revealed in Chapter 2 the most important change for the scheduled castes in Kerala in the twentieth century was abolition of tenancy and freedom from caste system bondage. The land reform abolished tenancy and provided small parcels of land, followed by economic changes due to employment migration to the Gulf countries. Both the land reform and Gulf migration have had a significant impact on their fertility though changes in their aspirations and changes in the institutional environment. This issue is examined in great length in the case study of Vettuvans in the following chapters.

Table 3.10: Fertility variation of scheduled castes compared to total Hindus and non-scheduled caste Hindus since the 1960s, Kerala

Years	1963-64[a]	1965-70[a]	1975-80[a]	1979[b]	1981[b]	1992-93[b]
Scheduled caste fertility variation from non-scheduled caste Hindus/total Hindus	+ 29	+ 32	+ 9	+ 7	+ 6	– 17

Notes: [a],Scheduled caste fertility from Nair; [b]Scheduled caste fertility from total Hindus.
Sources: Computed from Tables 3.6, 3.7 and 3.8.

3.4 Explanations offered for Kerala's fertility change

The previous sections showed the fertility transition in Kerala and the scheduled castes' and non-scheduled castes' fertility turnaround. The three questions that need answers based on the discussions in the previous sections are: Why did fertility levels drop to substantially low levels in Kerala? Why did the scheduled-caste and non-scheduled caste fertility turnaround occur in Kerala? And why is scheduled-caste fertility the lowest in Kerala?

Broadly speaking, there are two major strands of explanations for Kerala's fertility transition: social development (including social justice) and poverty. The social development hypothesis broadly assumes that developments in key social sectors have influenced the fertility transition in Kerala (Mehrotra, 1965; Gulati, 1976; Ratcliffe, 1978, 1983; Zachariah and Kurup, 1984; Franke and Chasin, 1989; Nag, 1989; Bhat and Rajan, 1997). The poverty argument is that the poor economic situation of the large majority of people in Kerala caused fertility decline (Mencher, 1980; Basu, 1986). These two sets of explanations are examined by a review of published literature.

3.4.1 The social development hypothesis

3.4.1.1 Education

One of the important social developments noted in Kerala is in the sector of education[8]. Several scholars have attributed the changes in fertility behaviour to the direct and indirect influences of literacy and schooling in Kerala (Mehrotra, 1965; George, 1976:4-7; Krishnan, 1976; Ratcliffe, 1978; Nayar, 1986; Nag, 1989; Bhat and Rajan, 1997; Krishnakumari and Moli, 1997; Zachariah, 1997). One of the important ways in which education influences fertility is by pushing the age at marriage of both men and women to a higher level, thus reducing the reproductive span.

While discussing the influence of education on age at marriage in Kerala, it is important to bear in mind that Kerala has had a relatively high age at marriage from the beginning of the present century compared to India, long before the spread of education. For example, in 1901 the average age at marriage of women in Kerala was 17.1 years compared to 13.2 years for India (Gulati, 1976). The question, then, is whether or not education influenced the marriage age of Kerala men and women. Gulati (1976) was sceptical about the general impression among the researchers that education is a reason for the higher age at marriage in Kerala. She pointed out that in Kerala both education and age at marriage were higher for women for a long period. The reason for the higher age at marriage was not education but *marumakkathayam*, the matrilineal kinship system which existed in Kerala.

Under *marumakkathayam*, succession is traced through the female line, and property descends from mother to daughter. Gulati pointed out that under such a system of kinship, marriage does not call for a change in residence for girls on their marriage. A matrilocal residence system, Gulati argued, would reduce the concern arising from a marriageable daughter staying on with her own parents. In contrast, she assumes that the absence of *marumakkathayam* in other parts of India may have caused concern to parents if marriageable daughters remain unmarried and stay with them (Gulati, 1976; Misra and Saseendran, 1988). In other words, parents from non-*marumakkathayam* communities are more likely to have their daughters married at early ages than are parents from *marumakkathayam* communities.

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[8] Education and literacy in Kerala are discussed in Chapter 2.

Gulati further suggested that when the *marumakkathayam* system weakened, coincidentally, the education of women and practice of dowry increased among many Hindu communities. This helped to keep the female age at marriage from falling and to some extent increased it. The positive statistical relationship found between female education and female age at marriage, she pointed out, has been viewed as education determining age at marriage. In Kerala the higher age of marriage came first and the expansion of female education came later; hence, the general view that education in Kerala caused the higher age at marriage may not be accurate for the early part of the twentieth century. However, since the *marumakkathayam* system was practised by only about half of the population of Kerala, Gulati's argument that the *marumakkathayam* system kept the marriage age higher in Kerala can be challenged.

Krishnan (1976), for example, argues for a stronger link between education and age at marriage. He showed that the female literacy rate rose from 12 per cent in 1921 to 45 per cent in 1961, with a corresponding increase in age at marriage. For example, the average age at marriage of women rose from around 15.9 years before 1921 to 18.6 by 1961. He suggested that the rise in female education could be an important reason for the higher age at marriage.

Krishnan's (1976) study further indicated that female education was a cause for low levels of fertility. Although there is a logical sequence in the interpretation that, when female education improves, age at marriage also improves, and an increased age at marriage will lower fertility, evidence (Gulati, 1976:1233), particularly for the early twentieth century does not support Krishnan's view.

Using the 1961 Fertility Survey in Kerala, Mehrotra (1965:164-174) carried out a detailed analysis of the relationship between education, age at marriage and fertility in rural and urban areas. The study revealed that in the rural areas illiterate and elementary-educated women with a marital duration of 15 years or more had an average of 5.6 children compared to 4.9 children for women with high school education. In urban areas, on average, illiterate women had 5.6 children, elementary-educated women had 5.4 children, and women with high-school-education had 4.1 children.

Mehrotra's (1965:172) study further revealed the importance of a woman's education compared to her husband's education in reducing fertility. The wife's education had a greater effect in lowering fertility than her husband's. Further, a high-school

education was considered to be the minimum needed for an appreciable decline in fertility. The study also reveals that illiterates did not act differently with regard to fertility in rural and urban areas, while literates did act differently. In fact rural-urban differentials in fertility increased with an increase in education; women with high school education in urban areas had substantially lower fertility than women with high school education in rural areas. No effort was made in Mehrotra's study to provide reasons for such variations in fertility.

In a comparative study of fertility and mortality transitions in Kerala and Punjab, Nag (1989:150,155) suggested that the effect of education on the proximate variables of fertility explained more than anything else the considerable decline in vital rates in both states. For Kerala, higher female education, widespread school facilities and their utilisation were given as the important factors influencing the proximate determinants such as good family planning and health services, their effective utilisation, and delayed age at marriage. But how all these changes were achieved in Kerala is much more important than just numbering the proximate determinants of fertility and mortality.

A regression analysis carried out by Krishnakumari and Moli (1997:166), using district-level data for the two decades 1971-1991, revealed that female literacy was the most important factor explaining variations in female age at marriage across districts in Kerala. Although female literacy was an important factor in explaining female age at marriage, it was less important in explaining male age at marriage. The explanatory variables the study incorporated were the proportion of effective male literates, proportion of effective female literates, percentage of urban population, sex ratio, female work participation rate, male work participation rate, and the proportion of labour force in agriculture. This study appears to have been guided by data availability rather than any conceptual framework, as it ignored many important variables such as religion, caste, women's status, economic status, practice of dowry, that have been reported as having an important role in determining the marriage age of both men and women.

Mahadevan and Sumangala (1987) provided a set of reasons for the increase in age at marriage for different age groups. They proposed 'aspiration and economic streams' for the delay in marriages. The aspiration stream includes delaying of marriage because of education or employment. Mahadevan and Sumangala argued that if there was an aspiration for better education and occupation, then both men and women would delay their marriage. The 'economic stream' involves delaying

marriage because of the cost of marriage. That is, parents may delay the marriage of daughters for want of funds to arrange sufficient dowry. Similarly, the marriage of sons may be delayed if they have financial obligations to fulfil in their family:

> Initially, the age at marriage of girls and boys goes up to 16 years (that is, up to final year of schooling), because they are getting an education. The marriage age goes further to 21 or 25 years when they wish to have higher education. After attaining education, marriage gets further delayed, mostly on account of economic difficulty (Mahadevan and Sumangala, 1987:79).

Jayasree's (1989) study in three community development blocks in Trivandrum district showed a higher age at marriage for Hindus, followed by Christians and Muslims. Jayasree believed the higher age at marriage of women among the Hindus accounted for their lower fertility and the lower age at marriage for the higher fertility of the Christians and Muslims. She also studied some of the important determinants of age at marriage. These are the cost of arranging a marriage, various reasons for early and late marriage, and socio-economic variables. The most important reason for higher age at marriage among the Hindus was the cost of arranging marriages.

The indirect role of education in fertility is also evident in the literature. Ratcliffe (1978:137) indicated that status and social mobility of women in Kerala have increased with educational attainment, as an increasing number of women are entering the service sector. But, contrary to Ratcliffe's observation, Indian censuses indicate that the female work participation rate has declined since 1961. For example, the female work participation rate in Kerala was 19.7 per cent in 1951 and dropped to 16.6 per cent in 1981 (Kumar, 1994:3250). Ratcliffe (1978:138) further pointed out that alternatives to childbearing become a real choice only for educated women. An increase in education, he added, will increase age at marriage. He identified attractive alternatives to marriage as a reason for 22 per cent of women in the age group 15-44 in Kerala remaining never- married[9] in 1969. Lack of evidence to indicate that women who remained never-married in Kerala had an 'attractive alternative to marriage', however, left his view untested. The role of increasing dowry in keeping many women unmarried, though it was not explored, could be one reason, as is evident from many other studies (Jayasree, 1989).

One of the most recent works that has linked fertility to education is a statistical analysis carried out by Bhat and Rajan (1997) using data from the 1961, 1971 and

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[9]The figure 22 per cent Ratcliffe mentioned does not reflect the percentage of women remaining unmarried by age 45-49.

1981 censuses. According to their analysis, the most significant variable in the decline in fertility between 1961 and 1981 was female literacy. They rejected almost every other possibility proposed by earlier researchers to explain Kerala's fertility decline:

> . . . there was no other significant factor [other than female literacy] that could explain the decline in CWRs [Child Women Ratio] in either Kerala, or in all the 19 districts combined . . . This is a surprising finding given the long list of factors—land reforms, female autonomy, ecology, unemployment, to name a few—which are said to be responsible for the decline in fertility in Kerala (Bhat and Rajan, 1997:69).

Kerala's fertility decline, Bhat and Rajan believe, took place according to the diffusion theory of Cleland and Wilson (1987). Their view is that education helped in the diffusion of birth control ideas to all sections of society including the illiterates. Accordingly, the channel of diffusion has been from literates to illiterates. They argued that the first to use birth control will be the educated. Once it is approved by educated women, illiterate women will follow suit. While several questions can be asked about their methodology and interpretation, and the evidence provided, only one question is raised here[10]. How can a minority of 'above primary school educated' women have a decisive role in the fertility behaviour of 'illiterate and/or below primary' level educated women? An examination of the female literacy data used by Bhat and Rajan reveals that the majority of Kerala women—about 86 per cent in 1961, 82 per cent in 1971, and 72 per cent in 1981—had only primary education or less (Saseendran, 1998).

Furthermore, some studies in Kerala indicated that an educational level of women above high school is needed for an appreciable change in fertility (Mehrotra, 1965:178; George, 1976:6). Evidence from by Basu (1986:267), however, regarding the sterilisation users during the period 1956-61 by occupation suggests that about 57 per cent of users were unskilled workers, agricultural labourers or cultivators. Assuming the general pattern that the educational level of unskilled workers, agricultural labourers and cultivators will be lower than that of skilled workers, business people, professional and other such workers, it can be said that many of the initial users of family planning in Kerala were illiterates. Under such circumstances it is less plausible to trace the path of diffusion from literates to illiterates. This is further supported by the fact that innovators of birth control come largely from the economically and most probably from the educationally backward groups (Zachariah, and Kurup, 1984):

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[10] For a fuller review of Bhat and Rajan's paper see Saseendran (1998).

> . . . the prevalence rate of sterilisation was highest among those with 1-4 years of schooling, not among those with more than 10 years of schooling; among Ezawas and the scheduled caste communities, not among the Nairs; and among women from households with per capita monthly expenditure of Rs. 50-59, not among those with monthly expenditures above Rs. 120 (Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:70).

A further challenge to the view that education is a vital factor in declining fertility in Kerala comes from data derived from the 1980 and 1991 surveys conducted in three districts of Kerala. While the 1980 survey indicated a significant and consistent decline in fertility with an increase in female and male schooling, the 1991 survey, on the contrary, indicated inconsistent and less significant declines in fertility with female and male schooling (Rajan *et al.,* 1996:282). It appears that educational variations with regard to fertility noticed in Kerala in 1980 may have represented caste category, and what was evident in 1991 was the diminishing relevance of those caste categories in shaping fertility differentials. In 1980 education and caste were probably matching each other; that is, lower caste entailed lower education and higher caste higher education, thus producing a consistent relation with fertility. This is consistent with the data on caste differentials in fertility discussed earlier in the chapter. By 1991, the match between education and caste may have lessened, thus resulting in an inconsistent relation of education with fertility. If education was important to the determination of fertility in Kerala, there is no reason why its importance would be less in 1991.

The above review suggests that the role of education in explaining fertility decline in Kerala is unclear. Its role has changed over time and under different circumstances. Apparently, all the studies documented in the review recognise that education influenced fertility either directly, by postponing marriages or delaying first birth because of particular careers, or indirectly, by changing attitudes towards number or quality of children. Also, education influenced the spread of birth control ideas to illiterates and less educated couples. However, the linear association between education and fertility that perhaps existed in the past needs to be re-examined in the present social, demographic and economic environment of Kerala. As we have seen, while fertility declined, education increased over the same period, allowing statistical analysis to come up with a high negative correlation. The interaction between education and fertility could be mutually reinforcing, rather than one influencing the other all the time. In my view, education in Kerala has been a cause and a consequence of caste-system changes. And, therefore, education needs to be seen in the context of the social, economic and political relationships that existed in Kerala in the past and present. For example, higher education, higher marriage age, and lower fertility could be three separate goals of couples in a given

institutional environment. The relationships between them, or lack of them, depend on the institutional environment that shapes their aspirations and constraints on achieving those aspirations.

3.4.1.2 Culture and status of women

In addition to education, Kerala's cultural traditions are often cited in explanations for fertility decline. Culture is seen by some researchers as a reason for the higher status of women in Kerala (Iyer, 1970:76-77; Jeffrey, 1992) and its subsequent influence to lower fertility (Fuller, 1976; Gulati, 1976; Nag, 1989; Devi, 1997). The most cited cultural practice in Kerala associated with status of women is the practice of *marumakkathayam*[11], the matrilineal, matrilocal and matriarchal system of inheritance. This was discussed chiefly when considering age at marriage, but it is of such centrality to many explanations of fertility change that it merits a more detailed consideration. Devi (1997), in a comparative study of Kerala and Madhya Pradesh (a north-central Indian state), emphasised the need to understand demographic change in relation to culture. She suggested that in Kerala the culture of the matriarchal system gave women status in the family, recognising them as individuals of significance. The lower fertility in Kerala, according to Devi, is a product of cultural norms and values that are conducive to a reduction in fertility. The higher fertility in Madhya Pradesh, on the other hand, is due to the lack of such a cultural environment.

The role of *marumakkathayam* in enhancing the status of women in Kerala society can be questioned on two grounds. Firstly, the *marumakkathayam* system virtually disappeared from Kerala before the onset of fertility decline. Evidence suggests that the *marumakkathayam* system had ceased to exist by around 1930 (Kurup *et al.*, 1965:23; Fuller, 1976:100; Franke and Chasin, 1989:93; Nair, 1965:185). Further, *marumakkathayam* was not practised by the entire population.

Secondly, under the *marumakkathayam* system that prevailed in Kerala it is hard to rule out the role of male dominance. For example, Fuller (1976) presents a detailed sketch of matrilineal joint families of Nairs in his study in Ramanakara, Kerala. The joint family, called *tharavad,* is a large group consisting of members of a matrilineal segment. The legal guardian of the *tharavad* is the oldest man, known as *karanavan.*

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[11]The history of Kerala suggests that the patriarchal system of family organisation prevailed in Kerala from early times and the matriarchal system was a development of the later period. The special circumstance which led to the transition from patriarchy to matriarchy was the war between Chera and Chola which continued for hundreds of years, AD 1000 —1325 (Nair, 1965:186).

Fuller reported that his respondents from Ramnakara often compared *karanavan* of the past with Rajas. The authority over children in the *tharavad* was vested in the *karanavan*, who was often their mother's brother:

> He [*karanavan*] is responsible for day-to-day discipline in the home and also for major decisions taken on behalf of the children, such as arrangement of their marriages (Fuller, 1976:55).

The marriage system of matrilineal communities such as the Nairs was known as *sambandam.* In *sambandam* male partners only visited women at night and did not stay with them in their *tharavad.* Both men and women were permitted more than one *sambandam* partner. Fuller (1976:108) reported that the *karanavan's* consent was essential before a man could become one of a woman's partners. Thus, women's power in the *tharavad* may have been limited, as is evident from the examples of Ramanakara and other literature (Zachariah, 1968:110; Fuller, 1976). A detailed investigation is needed to assess the status of women of *marumakkathayam* communities in Kerala.

What is not discussed, surprisingly, with reference to the higher status of women in Kerala is the extreme injustice suffered by the women of the Namboodiri, the highest caste. Among Namboodiris only the eldest sons were supposed to marry. Thus, many Namboodiri women would have remained unmarried as there would not have been enough first sons for all the women. The seclusion of these otherwise privileged women also did not allow them to travel to schools or markets, or be seen outside their house compounds. These Namboodiri women use a suffix *antharjanam*, or 'inside person', after their names, a reference to their being kept inside the large house all their lives (Franke and Chasin, 1989:91). These customs of the Namboodiris can scarcely be regarded as related to the higher status of their women. Those who advocated the role of cultural practices such as *marumakkathayam* as an important reason for the higher status of Kerala women have generally ignored the fate of Namboodiri women who were even deprived of their basic biological and social right to reproduce. Thus, literature on the status of women in Kerala exaggerated the role of *marumakkathayam* in the higher status of Kerala women.

Nag (1989) analysed indicators such as age-specific mortality rates of women, the percentage using purdah, the percentage supporting equal inheritance rights, the percentage of main female workers to the total female population, the ideal number of sons preferred, the ideal number of daughters preferred, and the son preference

index for Kerala and Punjab. On the basis of these indicators Nag suggested that Kerala women had a higher status than women in Punjab because the above indicators were in favour of Kerala. For example, the infant mortality rate for rural Kerala in 1976 was 54 per 1000 female live births compared to 61 per 1000 male live births. In contrast, in Punjab the infant mortality for females was 127 per 1000 live births compared to 108 per 1000 male live births, showing substantial female disadvantage.

Mahadevan and Sumangala (1987) in their study of one village each in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh (a south Indian state) showed that women in Kerala were more emancipated than women in Andhra Pradesh. They included six measures in their emancipation scale: (i) the individuality of women; (ii) dependency on husband; (iii) freedom of action in several aspects; (iv) participation in decision making; (v) roles generally performed; and (vi) permissibility of argument with husband. They also found a negative association of emancipation of women with fertility behaviour in both states. Since Kerala women were more emancipated than Andhra Pradesh women, Mahadevan and Sumangala concluded that this difference was responsible for the lower fertility in Kerala than in Andhra Pradesh. Why Kerala women are more emancipated than women in Andhra Pradesh is largely unanswered in their study.

However, analysis carried out by Rajan *et al.* (1996) using the Kerala Fertility Surveys of 1981 and 1991 concluded that Kerala women cannot be said to enjoy a high level of autonomy. They indicated that, although one-fourth of women hold property and/or an independent source of income, only a small proportion even of those women retain it under personal control. Furthermore, about two-thirds of women felt that they needed either their husbands' or their in-laws' permission to purchase personal goods. However, women were capable of deciding on their own in matters pertaining to child health, often because of the urgency of the matter. They suggested that female autonomy increased with education and they ruled out the role of historical cultural factors.

Asari's (1994) study of high school teachers in 14 districts of Kerala revealed that contraceptive use was not related to the sex combination of children of a couple. The determining factor in contraceptive use was the family size preference and not the gender preference. Asari's findings bring an important question: is there sex preference in Kerala? If couples terminate childbearing after having two sons, would it indicate son preference? If couples terminate childbearing after having two

daughters, would it indicate daughter preference? In my view, such a situation better explains the particular institutional environment in the society that does not permit more children so as to achieve at least one child of the desired sex. To understand sex preference we need to study the institutions of family and marriage more than the acceptance of terminal methods of family planning.

In sum, as with the education hypothesis, the overall effect of Kerala's culture of female autonomy can be exaggerated. Compared with much of the rest of India, Kerala women are generally less disadvantaged. But the specific mechanisms that turn this into low fertility are not always obvious.

3.4.1.3 Land reforms

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Kerala the traditional caste-system used to be the principle that governed the pattern of land ownership and cultivation. Under the traditional caste system the landlords were mostly Namboodiris, the upper-caste Hindus (Oommen, 1971:11). They, along with Nairs, another upper-caste group, controlled the bulk of wet land in Kerala. But neither community cultivated the land. They leased out land to lower-caste tenants such as the Ezavas, who, along with the untouchables, cultivated the land (Varghese, 1970:39; Franke and Chasin, 1989:55). A detailed discussion of these caste-land relationships was given in Chapter 2.

In 1970, land reform in Kerala provided ownership to tenants of a small piece of land on which their hut was located. In most cases the land reform provided ten cents[12] of land in rural areas and much less in urban areas. One of the ways in which land reform might influence fertility in the long term could be that those families that benefited from the land reform would find it difficult to get house sites for their children (Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:61; Zachariah, 1997:100). Zachariah and Kurup (1984) also suggested that landlords would not be prepared to lease their land to new tenants, fearing that they would never get it back. Nevertheless, the most important effect of land reform on fertility according to Zachariah and Kurup (1984) was the fundamental change in the attitude of people towards landed property:

> Land, particularly agricultural land, lost its prime position in the economics of Kerala society, and its place was taken by acquired qualifications. This basic change in value system has had a much deeper and long-lasting effect on the demand for fertility control than the various redistributions brought about by the land reforms (Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:65).

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[12] 100 cents= 1 acre; 1 acre= 0.40 hectares.

As revealed in Chapter 2, the land reform did not devalue landed property among those who received it. In fact, the land reform gave them what they have been denied for generations. It seems that Zachariah was trying to explain the fertility decline of the upper castes, who certainly have felt the 'value' of land declining as they have no tenant labourers to work for them. I believe that land reform did give the utmost importance to land for those tenants who received tenure of land as a result of the implementation of land reform in the 1970s.

Zachariah's (1983) study, using World Bank Fertility data from three districts of Kerala in 1980 to examine the role of land reforms in Kerala's fertility decline, yielded ambiguous evidence. The analysis indicated slightly higher fertility among those who gained land than among those who were not affected by the land transfer. Zachariah attributed this lack of association between fertility and land reform to the sterilisation and economic incentives of the family planning programme. He argued that much of the fertility decline in Kerala could be related to the high sterilisation rate, which is negatively associated with landownership. If Zachariah's finding is valid, India's population problem could have been solved with economic incentives. We have overwhelming evidence that economic incentives have little connection with acceptance of family planning in India (Bose, 1988). Furthermore, Zachariah's analysis of the association between fertility and land reform has ignored the principle of the caste system upon which landownership in Kerala was based. Any analysis without considering such dimensions of the caste system yields only ambiguous results.

According to Mahadevan and Sumangala (1987:29), the class of people who benefited most from the land reform were tenants and landless people. Ownership of land has led them to a greater consciousness of their situation, while those who lost land through land reform have faced economic difficulties in maintaining traditional status. Partitioning of landed property was no longer feasible because of the reduced land area as a result of successive land reforms and division among relatives. Similarly, those who gained landed property through reform were unable to divide the house site because it was too small to divide. Thus, those who lost or gained land had to limit their family size to maintain their status. These speculations, though promising, have not been explored in their study.

In sum, while land reform was a highly significant part of the creation of the modern Kerala society, its direct effect on fertility is unclear. In particular, by itself,

it cannot easily explain the differentials in fertility we observe today.

3.4.1.4 Family Planning

Although there are government claims that the national family planning programme efforts are responsible for Kerala's fertility decline (Ratcliffe, 1983:16), Nair (1974) noted that fertility decline in Kerala took place in the 1960s before the intensification of the family planning programme in 1965. The programme in Kerala was very limited during the period 1955 to 1963 (Nair and George, 1976:37).

In general, Kerala's family planning followed the Indian programme. Zachariah (1997:106) noted that the official family planning programme is not merely a means for providing contraceptive services, but also an independent causal factor in changing family size norms. The economic incentives given to the official acceptors of family planning were an important factor in the generation of demand for family planning services. Zachariah found that the success of family planning programmes in Kerala was because of the timing of its introduction. He argues that 'Kerala's family planning programme would have been much smaller and more temporary had the programme been introduced prior to a substantial reduction in IMR and substantial improvements in female education' (Zachariah, 1983:109). Regarding the role of family planning in Kerala's fertility decline, Zachariah and Kurup made the following conclusion from their World Bank Fertility Survey:

> Thus, in conclusion, the Kerala fertility survey provides enough evidence to show that the official family planning programme made a significant dent on the marital fertility rate of Kerala women, especially those in the middle and lower strata. In the absence of a public programme, the fertility decline in the state would have been only about two-thirds of the actual decline experienced (Zachariah and Kurup, 1984:70)

However, while increased use of family planning is obviously a necessary element in fertility decline, the extent to which the programme can be judged as the underlying cause of that decline is not clear. It is probably better seen as an enabling mechanism than as a fundamental factor in its own right.

3.4.1.5 Mortality decline

Kerala's fertility decline was preceded by a long-term decline in mortality. Ratcliffe (1983:16) argues that since mortality decline took place long before fertility decline, it is not possible to accept that fertility decline was an adaptive response to increases of infant and child survival. Zachariah and Kurup (1984) suggest that even at the

level of the individual family the gradual perception of falling infant and child mortality may be reducing fertility because of the expected increase in the cost of bringing up children. In Basu's (1986:275) view the time lag between mortality and fertility decline in Kerala may have some bearing on the fertility decline through the increasing density of population in the state.

Mahadevan and Sumangala (1987:165) in their village study near Trivandrum[13] have shown that there is a direct relationship between the level of mortality and the level of fertility irrespective of age of couple. They inferred from their study that the past decline in mortality in Kerala has substantially contributed to the recent decline in fertility in the state, but they have not provided any evidence for this conclusion. Nair (1974) showed that the fall in birth rates in the early 1960s could have been the consequence of the decline in infant and child mortality rates during the late 1950s, following the extension of primary health centres and other public health measures. Overall, while mortality decline acted in some deep sense as a long-run precondition for fertility transition, there is little evidence of any tight causal relationship.

3.4.1.6 Poverty

Kerala's poor economic situation is yet another factor identified by researchers as one of the important reasons for fertility transition (Mencher, 1980; Basu, 1986). Mencher's study in two paddy-growing regions of Kerala—Palghat and Kuttanad—revealed that a large amount of fertility decline in Kerala has come from the lowest socio-economic groups, the landless agricultural labourers, and to some extent the industrial labourers:

> . . . the main reason why agricultural labourers in Kerala, in the beginning of 1980s, prefer to have fewer children is that it is no longer economically advantageous to have them, because of the extreme pressures on employment that exists in the state as a whole, and in agriculture in particular (Mencher, 1980:1783).

After a careful scrutiny of evidence on employment opportunities and the actual number of days people were employed as agricultural labourers, Mencher (1980:1787) suggested that 'the fertility decline among agricultural labourers need not be seen as an indication of improvement in their quality of life. In the Kerala context, it can equally well be seen as a sign of greater poverty'. In my view, Mencher needs more long-term data to put her findings in perspective. That means, whether economic conditions of the agricultural labourers have deteriorated or

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[13] The name Trivandrum has been changed to Thiruvananthapuram by the Government of Kerala.

improved from their earlier periods is more important than simply attempting to explain one time status.

Basu (1986) provided more substantial evidence to indicate the role of poverty-induced fertility transition in Kerala. She pointed out that there is a marked difference between the poor of Kerala and those in the rest of India. In Kerala, the poor are largely in the wage-earning category, while it is the self-employed who constitute the majority of the poor in other parts of the country. She argued that it is not just poverty *per se*, but poverty coupled with wage-earning status which provides the conditions for fertility decline. She totally rejected the theory of socially-led fertility transition in Kerala. The hypothesis she proposed for Kerala's fertility decline is that:

> At the top of the scale are the couples who voluntarily restrict the sizes of their families for the traditional reasons of changing aspirations and values. However, a significant proportion of the fertility decline is negatively inspired—i.e. it is attributable to fertility control by a section of the population which is motivated by its own special kind of poverty rather than by increasing affluence or welfare (Basu, 1986:278).

Basu's arguments are questioned by Bhat and Rajan (1997:64-65). They argue that agricultural labourers in Kerala are more literate than their counterparts in other states of India, they live in a society where most can read and write, knowledge of family planning methods is highly diffused, and the use of these methods does not meet social disapproval.

In my view, if Basu's argument is valid, the agricultural labourers in Kerala should have had lower fertility than the non-labouring population in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, because they were much poorer than in the 1990s. However, that did not happen in Kerala. Thus, it is true that the sterilisation acceptors in Kerala were mostly agricultural labourers, but is unlikely that this was due to their poverty.

A recent study by James (1997), using fertility data from Palghat and Alappuzha, two rice-growing districts, has examined the hypothesis of Mencher (1980) and Basu (1986) that fertility decline in Kerala was largely due to peculiar situations of impoverishment that prevailed in Kerala. To understand the level of poverty in both districts, James constructed an index using indicators such as per capita household expenditure, amount of land owned, ownership of livestock, type of ownership of house, education of husband and wife, source of drinking water, sanitation facility, and energy used for lamp. Unfortunately, the index developed is not representative

of poverty for two reasons. First, inclusion of social indicators such as education, source of drinking water, and sanitation biases the index to a more developed part of Kerala, such as Alappuzha. For example, a household which: (i) has half an acre of land (ii) spends less per capita on household expenses because they cultivate rice and some vegetables on their land (iii) has uneducated or elementary-educated family members (iv) possesses its own house and one cow (v) and does not have a well or pipe for drinking water, according to James, will come under the category of extremely poor or very poor. Such a situation is more common in Palghat than Alappuzha. On the other hand, a household with just a hutment land, run by an educated couple, who spend more per head on household expenses because they do not produce anything (because of lack of land), with a modern sanitary facility, and which uses a modern source of energy, according to James, will come under the category of non-poor. Again such a situation is more common in Alappuzha than Palghat. Thus, selection of poverty indicators may be biased or manipulated to serve a particular purpose. Secondly, the indicators used by James are mostly region or district-specific and have little value for comparative purposes. The conclusion drawn from James's study that ' the poor breed more' is based on defective analysis and can neither prove nor disprove Basu's (1986) or Mencher's (1980) argument of poverty-induced fertility transition in Kerala. A more careful analysis is required[14].

3.4.1.7 Location advantage

In addition to social and economic factors, Kerala's ecology, population density, and settlement pattern are reported as having influenced fertility decline, for example by making social services more accessible and facilitating social development (Nayar, 1986; Franke and Chasin, 1989:22-23; Srinivasan, 1995:246).

Locational factors may also have played a long-run role in shaping tradition and culture. Kerala has a western sea coast of 425 kilometres. It gets both the North-West and South-East monsoons which provide a plentiful supply of water during the greater part of the year. Backwaters, family ponds[15], and family wells are common in Kerala. Some traditions, such as taking a bath every morning and washing clothes every day, may have some relation with the environmental position of the state. Researchers believe that these traditional practices may have improved personal hygiene and thus improved the general health situation (Bhat and Rajan, 1997:48).

[14]See Krishnaji (1983) for a critical review of literature on 'fertility and poor'.
[15]Family ponds are now disappearing as land becomes scarce. As a result of family property division, it has become inevitable that families convert ponds into housing plots as land availability is very limited.

But the conversion of family ponds to housing plots, and increasing density of houses may not have the same leverage on public health as in the past. For example, swimming used to be an essential part of the daily bathing of both men and women, but lack of family ponds or changes of life style now prevent many Keralites from swimming, an exercise believed to be good for health. This may have some influence in what Panikar and Soman (1984) found in Kerala: coexistence of high morbidity and low mortality. They found low mortality due to a better health care system and high morbidity due to degenerative diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

According to Nair (1986) the long western sea coast also made it possible for both Christianity and Islam to enter Kerala. Nayar (1986:158) argues that the geographic setting of Kerala is crucial for its present religious composition, which includes 21 per cent Christians and 21 per cent Muslims. It is important to note that the percentage of Christians in India as a whole is only three per cent (Srinivasan, 1995:247). This cultural difference in religious composition is often related to fertility variations between states. But as Table 3.11 shows, evidence suggests that the early acceptors of family planning in Kerala were disproportionately Hindus, mostly agricultural labourers, and relatively few were non-Hindus.

Table 3.11: Adoption of contraception by religion, Kerala, 1961-62

Religion	Religious groups as per cent of total population	Per cent of contraceptive acceptors
Hindu	60	72
Christian	20	18
Muslim	20	10
Total	100	100

Source: Ratcliffe, 1983:16.

The settlement pattern is yet another factor unique to Kerala. Households in Kerala are widely scattered. Each house has some garden or coconut field surrounding it. Villages in Kerala are continuous; it is hard to locate where one village ends and another begins. Kumar (1965:87) pointed out that villages in Malabar (one of the northern districts of Kerala) were not of the standard Indian pattern, for in Malabar there were no sharply demarcated areas composed of all the village houses. Instead, there was an almost continuous stretch of plots, with a family residence in the centre

of each. For administrative purposes, groups of plots were aggregated into an administrative unit, but these did not have the corporate life of other Indian villages. In Kerala, there is also no specific location in a village where a specific community will have houses. One of the important roles of a scattered settlement pattern is that it has promoted individualism and competition in political and economic pursuits (Nayar, 1986:158). Researchers also believe that the scattered settlement pattern has helped check the spread of diseases, and this helped reduce mortality (Bhat and Rajan, 1997:48).

The scattered settlement pattern has demanded a greater network of roads to link different scattered households; it is estimated that Kerala has one of the highest road densities in India. Well-connected roads accelerate communication, enable newspapers to reach every corner of the state, and help in the quick delivery of health and family planning services. Nayar (1986) and Nag (1989:148) argue that all these factors have had a significant impact on the mortality and fertility of Kerala.

The size of villages is another striking feature of Kerala. About three-fourths of the villages in Kerala have a population of 10,000 or more, whereas the all-India proportion of villages of equal size is only 0.3 per cent (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:4).

Finally, Kerala has had higher population density historically than India as a whole (Kurup, 1978; Zachariah, 1995:96). Even in 1901 the population density in Kerala was more than twice that of India. Zachariah (1995) suggests that high population density and the peculiar settlement pattern in the state make land reform and other socio-economic reforms more relevant in Kerala than in other states of India (Zachariah, 1995:96). One of the important reasons for the success of the public distribution system (PDS) in Kerala could be the accessibility of distribution outlets to a majority of the rural population. According to Srinivasan (1995:246), higher population density in Kerala is one reason for Keralites to adopt the Malthusian check—to increase age at marriage.

Taken together, those environmental factors clearly have played a role in Kerala's unique history. However, it is surely stretching geographical determinism beyond plausible limits to argue that they played any immediate and direct role in bringing about fertility decline.

3.5 Synthesis of existing explanations for Kerala's fertility decline and scheduled caste and non-scheduled caste fertility turnaround

The most prominent explanation for Kerala's fertility decline is education. Almost every study reviewed mentions the direct or indirect role of education in the present fertility decline in Kerala. While it may be true that education in Kerala is the key to its fertility decline, the circumstances that led Keralites to opt for education go far beyond the need for education *per se*. While the traditional explanations such as education, increase in age marriage, and mortality decline have a positive role in the fertility change, they only explain part of the story. Although much is published about Kerala's fertility change, few analyses are based on field studies, others draw solely on secondary data. Clearly, there is a lack of field-based micro studies in Kerala. The review of studies of Kerala very strongly suggests that the time has come to use the available secondary data sources as a foundation and to combine them with field-based research to seek answers to Kerala's fertility decline.

Another point about the studies to explain fertility change in Kerala is that studies attempting to explain fertility decline in Kerala ironically neglect differentials in fertility between caste groups. The fact is that Kerala is not a homogeneous society nor does it have homogeneous fertility among its various social groups. Thus, explanations of fertility change in Kerala have to incorporate the fundamental social and economic organisation of contemporary Keralan society. To my knowledge no study has touched upon the issue of caste-system changes or the impact of these on the social and economic organisation of Kerala society, and thereby on the fertility transition. An investigation of fertility differentials may provide deeper insights into Kerala's fertility decline. In this regard it is important to note that no study so far has been published dealing with the exceptionally low fertility of the lower-caste communities of Kerala. In summary, to explain Kerala's fertility decline an investigation of Kerala as a heterogeneous society is required. And as Mencher (1980) has noted:

> When it comes to the question of fertility, this is a much more complex issue. It is necessary to look separately at different socio-economic classes within the population to find the reasons for the declining birth rate (Mencher, 1980:1782).

Finally, the available literature did not give clear answers to the questions posed in the beginning of section 3.4. Although abundant interpretations are available to explain fertility decline in Kerala, the debate continues unabated. However, a debate on yet another topic is still to come: on scheduled caste fertility decline and the

turnaround. I consistently argue in this review that understanding the caste system and its changes is important to understand what apparently is the 'Kerala Paradox'.

3.6 Relevance of fertility transition theories in Kerala's fertility decline

Given the above reasoning, which theory could explain the fertility change in Kerala? Regarding classical demographic transition theory, its relevance to Kerala is very remote (Ratcliffe, 1983). The context in which demographic transition is envisaged in the classical theory is industrialisation and modernisation which cause changes in the benefits to parents from having children. Kerala has had neither significant industrialisation nor urbanisation which can account for the remarkable fertility decline during 1960-1990. What is seemingly supportive of demographic transition theory in Kerala is the decline in mortality which occurred much earlier than fertility decline. But the much longer lag between declines in morality and fertility casts doubt on their close relationship. Though Kerala illustrates typical demographic transition stages, the underlying causes are not those postulated in classical transition theory.

Did diffusion of birth control ideas play any significant role in Kerala's fertility transition? The nature of the innovators of family planning determines the nature of diffusion of birth control ideas. Evidence suggests that fertility decline took place earlier in the princely states of Cochin and Travancore than in those of the Malabar region which was under the Madras Presidency. But there is no suggestion of the possible diffusion of birth control ides from the former to the latter. Furthermore, the first users of modern family planning are reported to have been disproportionately poor agricultural labourers (Mencher, 1980; Basu, 1986). Given Kerala's caste system in the 1960s and the educational backwardness of agricultural labourers compared to land-owning upper-caste communities, it is not likely that any ideas would flow from the less-educated working class to more-educated upper castes. Some researchers believe that the diffusion of birth control ideas from literate to illiterate is the most appreciated mechanism that has given rise to fertility decline in Kerala (Bhat and Rajan, 1997). But this possibility is refuted by others (Saseendran, 1998). Evidence provided by Basu (1986) that agricultural labourers were the first modern contraceptive users in Kerala also contradicts the claim of Bhat and Rajan that birth control ideas spread from the educated to the less-educated.

Western material culture has influenced Kerala significantly. The migration of Keralites to cosmopolitan centres in India and foreign countries, trade relations with the West, and modern media have probably contributed to this influence. How much that Western influence has changed the emotional and economic nucleation of Kerala families is doubtful, however. This may be true for the joint families, with *tharavad* changes among Nairs and *illam* changes among Namboodiris. Kerala, under the rigid caste system, had a strong land-owning class and a tenant labouring class. The land-owning class never cultivated the land themselves; thus the familial mode of production envisaged by Caldwell (1976, 1980, 1982) in his wealth-flow theory did not exist among the Nairs or Namboodiris. Among the Nairs, it was the head of the joint family, *tharavad karanavar,* who managed the agricultural production. Roles of children in agricultural production or other economic affairs of the family were very limited. Rather children were involved only in education-related activities until they were well into their twenties. Thus, among the land-owning Nairs and Namboodiris, wealth-flows were from the older generation to the younger, even under relatively high marital fertility regimes.

Mainstream economic theory has perhaps the least potential to explain fertility transition in Kerala. In the absence of a strong consumer economy in the 1960s, when fertility started to decline sharply, the question of consumer choice between children and other consumer durables did not arise. Even Easterlin's (1978) synthesis cannot explain the causes of fertility change beyond the role of education in changing the motivation for regulating fertility. Desiring small families, for example, and the role of land reform in motivating new small land-owners can hardly be explained by Easterlin's (1978) famous synthetic framework.

An institutional approach seems to be a more promising way to investigate fertility decline in Kerala, particularly to explain the fertility differentials and turnarounds that have been illustrated above. The institutional approach allows us to examine local patterns of social organisation—particularly the family and local community; family and property law and the local dimension of public administration; the stratification system and the mobility paths it accommodates; and the labour market (McNicoll, 1994:206). It is a particular version of institutional theory (Greenhalgh, 1988) that will, therefore, be used as the explanatory framework of this study.

3. 7 Conclusion

In the previous chapters and this chapter, the purpose was to draw a macro level institutional framework of Kerala and its unique position in India. On the demographic front, the two significant factors about Kerala are its low fertility and still lower fertility of the scheduled castes. On the social front, the significant factor is the transition of Kerala society from a traditional caste system to a non-traditional caste system. Although the caste system changes are the most important aspect of Kerala society in the twentieth century, such explanations have not occurred in the explanations for fertility decline. The anomaly of scheduled-caste fertility and its turnaround with non-scheduled caste fertility are issues that are not yet identified in the literature.

The chapters that follow are devoted to understanding fertility transition in the Vettuvan community, a selected scheduled caste community in Kerala. Chapter 4 provides a detailed picture of fertility and family planning among the Vettuvans, in order to know precisely what it is that we need to explain.

Chapter 4

Fertility and Family Planning Among the Vettuvans

4.1 Introduction

The first three chapters of this thesis have delineated the intellectual scope of the research. The next four deal mostly with the detailed results of the investigation. The purpose of this chapter is to examine fertility levels and trends, fertility preferences, and family planning practices among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour. Information on the data sets used for the calculation of various fertility measures is given in Table 4.1. The chapter has four sections. The section on fertility examines fertility levels, birth intervals, fertility differentials and trends using various demographic methods such as rates, ratios and cohort parity achievement. The section on family planning investigates the status of ever-use, current use, and non-use of modern contraception, and future use intentions with regard to modern family planning methods. Desire for additional children, family size, and sex preferences are discussed in the section on fertility preferences. In order to provide a proper perspective on the relatively small sample, wherever possible, comparisons will be made with scheduled castes of Kerala and with Kerala as a whole.

Table 4.1: Data sources for various fertility measures used in Chapter 4

Total population covered in the study[a]	Total no. of ever-married women	Total no. of widowed women	Total no. of currently married women	Total no. of currently married women interviewed[b]	Total number of ever-married women interviewed in the age group 60-79[c]
1886	371	20	351	308	68

Notes: This study did not collect fertility-related data for the age group 50-59; [a]Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997; [b]Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; [b]Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997;[c]Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

4.2 Fertility

4.2.1 Current fertility levels

4.2.1.1 Birth rate

During the survey reference period, from 1 March 1996 to 28 February 1997, the crude birth rate (CBR) was 13.8 live births per 1000 population. Since numbers of births are vital in the calculation of CBR and other fertility measures, all births that occurred in the surveyed families were recorded in the household survey schedule. This was made possible by repeatedly reminding the interviewers of the need for probing and examining the filled-out interview schedules on the same day as data collection. Furthermore, local interviewers were, to some extent, knowledgeable about the vital events which happened in their neighbourhood. In addition, repeat visits to each household for subsequent interviews[1] enabled us to check the household information if we had any doubt on the non-inclusion of births or about infant deaths. Wives' interviews in particular helped to verify our household data on births. Therefore, birth data recorded for this sample are of acceptable quality, and hence the CBR is reliable.

A CBR of 13.8 indicates that current fertility in the community is low. A CBR of 21 was set as India's fertility goal in the Sixth Five-Year Plan to be achieved by the year 2001 (Srinivasan, 1995:42)[2]. Vettuvan fertility, therefore, was substantially lower in 1997 than the national fertility goal set for the year 2001. Since the CBR is a crude measure, it can only be used as a rough indication of the possible fertility levels. More refined measures of fertility discussed in the following sections will shed more light on this aspect.

A comparison of the Vettuvan age-standardised CBR with the Kerala and India NFHS is shown in Table 4.2. The comparison is potentially inexact, as about four years elapsed between the Kerala NFHS and the Vettuvan survey. Nevertheless, this comparison helps indicate the relative position of Vettuvan fertility in a wider

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[1]After the household survey, we had to arrange three visits to each household for interviewing husbands and wives, elderly men and women, school-going children, and non-school-going individuals. However, in households without the above categories, only one visit was enough.

[2]Other targets recommended along with a CBR of 21 were (i) crude death rate of 9 (ii) infant mortality rate of 60 (iii) life expectancy of 64 years and (iv) effective couple protection rate of 60. These were the demographic goals of India set in the Sixth Five-Year plan for the year 2001 (Srinivasan, 1995:42-43). All are already far exceeded in Kerala.

context. The CBRs for Kerala and India were 17.9 and 27.5, respectively, in 1997 according to the Sample Registration System (SRS, 1998) estimates. Although these are of comparable dates, they are non-standardised CBRs. The standardised CBRs for Vettuvans, Kerala and India were 13.8, 21.8 and 38.5 per 1000 live births, respectively. The most plausible conclusion that can be drawn is that Vettuvan fertility is markedly lower than the average Kerala levels and much lower than that of India as a whole. However, only standardised figures of comparable dates can confirm this claim.

Table 4.2: Age-standardised[f] crude birth rate (CBR) for the Vettuvans, Kerala and India, various years

Vettuvan	Kerala	India
13.8 (1996-97)[a]	21.8 (1990-93)[b]	38.5 (1990-93)[e]
	17.6 (1990-93)[c]	27.2 (1997)[d]
	17.9 (1997)[d]	

Notes and Sources: [a]Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997 (directly standardised); CBR based on one year preceding the survey of 1997; [b]PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:55 (directly standardised); [c]PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:55 (not standardised); Based on two years preceding the 1992-93 survey; [d]SRS, 1998:1 (not standardised). [e]IIPS, 1995:90 (directly standardised); CBR based on two years preceding the survey of 1992-93; [f]Shryock and Siegel (1993:2-5), Section: Standardisation, Chapter 6. Standard Population is the Vettuvan Population.

4.2.1.2 Age-specific and total marital fertility rate

The CBR is a crude measure of fertility influenced by the age-sex structure of a population. A more accurate picture of fertility can be obtained from the age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) and the total fertility rate (TFR). The ASFRs for various age groups are given in Table 4.3. The pattern has a distinctive inverted U-shape experienced the world over. In a typical fertility pattern, fertility rises sharply from practically zero at age 15 to a peak in the 20s and then declines gradually and reaches zero again at around 50 years of age (UNFPA, 1993:10.5). In the Vettuvan sample, no births were reported in the age group 15-19, and hence the ASFR is zero for that age. This may be because the proportion of married women in the 15-19 age group was very small (see Table 6.2) and also because very few women in that age group give birth. Also no births were reported in the age group 35-39 years and

above[3]. One of the possible reasons for not having births for this age group may be a complete termination of childbearing after 35 years of age. Whatever the reason, all births in the sample were confined to age groups 20-24 to 30-34[4]. Among the three age groups 20-24, 25-29 and 30-34, fertility was highest in the age group 20-24. This also follows the general pattern of fertility observed in many populations in the world.

The age-specific marital fertility rates are given in Table 4.3. The ASMFRs show a similar pattern to that of the ASFRs. Since all births reported in this analysis are 'legitimate', that is, within marriage, the ASMFRs must be higher than (or equal to) the age-specific fertility rates. The greater difference in the ASMFRs and ASFRs in the younger age groups indicates that a higher proportion of women remained unmarried in those age groups.

The analysis carried out in this section shows that reproduction is confined to women 20-35 years of age, which suggests that there is a strong effort to control fertility among the Vettuvans at higher ages. Contraceptive-use status discussed in section 4.3.2 will enable this pattern of age-specific fertility to be confirmed.

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[3]The Kerala NFHS states: 'The age specific fertility rates for women belonging to scheduled caste/scheduled tribe, ... indicate that during the three years preceding the survey, there were no births to scheduled caste women age 35 and above' (PRC Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS Bombay).
[4]The effective reproductive span when calculated using the average age at first birth (21.2 years) and last birth (28.4 years) for the women in the age group 45-49 is 7.2 years. However, when we used the age at first birth (20.6) and average age at last birth (24.2) of all women who had adopted a permanent family planning method, the effective reproductive span was reduced to 3.6 years.

Table 4.3: Age-specific marital fertility rates (ASMFRs), and age-specific fertility rates (ASFRs) for the Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1996-97

Age of women (years)	Total number of births	Total number of married women	Total number of women	Age-specific marital fertility rate (ASMFR)	Age-specific fertility rate (ASFR)
15-19	na	9	104	na	na
20-24	18	68	137	0.265	0.131
25-29	5	79	101	0.063	0.049
30-34	3	45	57	0.067	0.053
35-39	na	71	78	na	na
40-44	na	41	52	na	na
45-49	na	38	45	na	na

Notes: na indicates no births in that category.
Total marital fertility rate = 1.97 (Calculated from the Table 4.3)
Total fertility rate = 1.17 (Calculated from the Table 4.3)
Births refer to period March 1996 to February 1997.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997; Births and ages of 21 married women who were not part of the Vettuvan Wife's Survey included in this calculation.

The total fertility rate (TFR) is a summary measure that indicates the number of children a woman would bear during her reproductive years if she were to experience the age-specific fertility rates prevailing at the time of the survey (Hobbs and Bogue, 1993:10.3-10.4). The TFR calculated for the Vettuvans in Engandiyour is 1.17 children per woman. This is much below the replacement-level fertility of 2.1[5] children per woman.

The total marital fertility rate (TMFR) is yet another summary measure of fertility. For the Vettuvans in Engandiyour this is 1.97 children per woman. This means, on average, a married woman would bear 1.97 children during her life time if she were to bear children throughout her reproductive years at the rates specified by the schedule of age-specific marital fertility rates that prevailed during the Vettuvan Wife's Survey. Because the TMFR and TFR are cross-sectional measures, full details of fertility dynamics[6] are difficult to access unambiguously using them. Nevertheless, a few points are self-evident.

[5] A TFR of 2.1 children per woman is one of the recommendations of the document on national policy on population prepared by K.C. Pant, Head, Planning Commission, Government of India, for a discussion in the Union Cabinet in 1999 (*Times of India* News Service).
[6]For example, postponement of births or compensation for an earlier decision to delay birth may give a completely different picture of fertility.

A comparison of TFRs of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour with the scheduled castes of Kerala, and the whole populations of Kerala and India is given in Table 4.4. The TFR of the Vettuvans, like other measures discussed in this section, shows a lower value than for those in Kerala and India. The various measures of fertility discussed in this section suggest that Vettuvan fertility is most likely to be lower than that of the whole population of Kerala and the average Indian level. In absolute terms, the current fertility levels of the Vettuvans show that it is well below replacement level (because mortality levels too are low[7]).

Table 4.4: Comparison of TFR of Vettuvans with TFRs of whole of Kerala, India, and scheduled castes of Kerala, various years

Type of Population	Vettuvan[a]	Kerala SC[b]	Kerala[b]	India[c]
TFR	1.17[d]	1.37[e]	2.0[e]	3.39[f]

Notes: [d]Rates refer to one year preceding the 1997 survey; [e]Rate refers to 1990-93; [f]Rate refers to 1990-93; SC = Scheduled caste.

Sources: [a]Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; [b]PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:58; [c]IIPS, 1995:97.

4.2.2 Fertility Trends

Trends in parity attainment by exact ages for various age cohorts are given in Table 4.5. The average parity attained at exact ages is calculated using the information on age of women and the number of births. While average parity is calculated at exact age for each age cohort, the lower limit of that particular age cohort is used as a cut-off for analysis because all the women in that cohort have passed through that age. If an upper age limit were used, on the other hand, a woman at the upper age limit might have had higher fertility than a woman at the lower age limit which would result in a truncation problem. The exact ages and their intervals shown in the table are decided on the basis of giving the base age of each age cohort and the pace of attainment of parity for the purposes of a clearer illustration.

[7]According to the Kerala 1992-93 NFHS, the CDR was 6.2 and IMR was 23.8 (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:125, 129)

From the data gathered in this study it is impossible to trace exactly when fertility began to decline among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour. However, there is an indication that fertility had declined in the age cohort 65-69 compared to that of the age cohort 70-79[8]. A decline in fertility in the age cohort 65-69 broadly suggests that fertility had declined from around the period 1948-1950s[9].

Clear evidence of fertility decline can be seen in the age cohort 45-49 and below. In the age cohort 45-49, for example, there was a negligible increase in the average parity after age 30, and no addition after 39 years of age, whereas the parity achievements for the age cohort 60-64 and above continued until the age of 45 years. These changes indicate the possibility of stronger deliberate birth control, possibly use of a permanent family planning method in the age cohort 45-49, and the absence of such efforts, or permanent family planning use, in the older age cohorts[10]. Translation of this information into calendar years suggests that stronger motivation to control fertility may have begun at least from the years 1968-1972, if not earlier.

The age cohort 35-39 exhibits more evidence of deliberate efforts to control fertility. There were no births reported in this age cohort after they reached 32 years of age. Their average parity at age 32 was 2.5 children per woman. Although it is possible, theoretically, for these women to have children, it is quite unlikely that this cohort will have a significant further increase in their fertility, because the open birth interval of this cohort is 3-7 years. It will be seen in section 4.3.2 that contraceptive use between births is negligible among the Vettuvans. It is more likely, therefore, that the age cohort 35-39 terminated childbearing by adopting a permanent family planning method.

For the age cohort 30-34, the increment in parity from exact age 28 to exact age 30 was only 0.06, while the increment for the older cohorts is considerably higher for the same ages. This suggests that majority of women of the age cohort 30-34 started terminating childbearing as early as age 28.

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[8]Special efforts were made to reduce the memory lapse about children who died at very early ages. This involved confirming birth history with sisters, brothers and other reliable sources.
[9]This calculation assumes fertility beginning at 20 years of age.
[10]We cannot rule out deliberate effort to control births in the higher age cohorts, but if it occurred, its impact was slight.

Table 4.5 also indicates that at exact age 20 and lower, the average attainment in parity is slightly higher among the younger age cohorts than the older age cohorts. The parity attainment at exact age 30 or higher, on the other hand, is lower for the lower age cohorts than the higher age cohorts. This indicates an increasing tendency to complete childbearing early in younger age cohorts compared to older age cohorts. Table 4.5 also indicates the shorter reproductive span among the younger age cohorts (not as a part of the age effect) compared to the higher age cohorts.

To sum up, the following conclusions can be made about fertility trends among the Vettuvans from the parity trend analysis just discussed. First, fertility has been declining among the Vettuvans at least from the 1950s, and the declining trend is continuing unabated. Secondly, stronger fertility control may have begun from the years 1968-70, with possible use of terminal methods of family planning. Thirdly, there is a greater tendency to terminate childbearing at an early age in the younger age cohorts compared to the older ones. In short, the cohort analysis clearly indicates a massive fertility transition among the Vettuvans, from a moderately high fertility to a very low fertility.

Table 4.5: Distribution of average parity attained by exact ages for age cohorts, Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Exact age	Age at the time of interview								
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	60-64	65-69	70-79
18	0.27	0.27	0.32	0.29	0.20	0.14	0.25	0.19	0.20
19	0.58	0.36	0.57	0.58	0.38	0.38	0.43	0.23	0.20
20	0.81	0.59	0.85	0.86	0.70	0.70	0.75	0.46	0.55
23		1.20	1.53	1.53	1.55	1.65	1.39	1.00	1.05
25		1.56	1.85	2.03	2.10	2.14	1.96	1.50	1.50
28			2.13	2.39	2.40	2.62	2.60	2.19	2.00
30			2.19	2.46	2.60	2.94	2.96	2.69	2.60
32				2.50	2.68	3.05	3.07	2.92	3.15
35				2.50	2.70	3.20	3.53	3.31	3.95
39					2.75	3.27	3.96	3.69	4.80
40					2.75	3.27	4.00	3.73	5.10
45						3.27	4.18	4.07	5.65
No. of women	59	63	46	59	40	37	26	27	20

Notes: Since information in this table has come from the Vettuvan Wife's Survey which takes in the 15-49
year age group, and the Elderly Vettuvan Survey which takes 60+ ages, there is unfortunately no information about the 50-59 age group.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

4.2.3 Children ever born and surviving

In addition to considering fertility on its own, it is also possible to assess the joint effect of fertility and mortality in producing the number of surviving children. Table 4.6 shows children ever born (CEB) and children surviving (CS) for the Vettuvans of Engandiyour and the whole population of Kerala. For the Vettuvans of Engandiyour, the average CEB per woman in the age group 45-49 was 3.3 children. The corresponding figure according to the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS was 4.3 children per woman (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:63). The CEB for all age groups, except 20-24, was lower among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour than the figure for the whole of Kerala. Since there is a time lag of 4-5 years between the two surveys, the difference in the CEB cannot necessarily be taken as a true difference in their fertility. However, a reasonable inference would be that the fertility of the Vettuvans is certainly not higher than fertility for Kerala as a whole.

The comparison of children ever born and children surviving indicates that survival probabilities, in absolute terms, among the Vettuvans are high. In 1997, nearly nine-tenths of the children born to women in the age cohort 45-49 were surviving. This may have important implications for the fertility strategies of the Vettuvans. Interviews with Vettuvan women revealed great optimism about the survival of children as infant deaths are very rare; during the 12 months period 1995-96 there was only one infant death recorded in the village[11] (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:31).

[11] See Chapter 3 for details about health and mortality in the study village.

Table 4.6: Distribution of average number of children ever born (CEB) and surviving (CS) by age of mother, Vettuvan (1997) of Engandiyour and Kerala as a whole, 1992-93

Age group of women	Vettuvans[a]		Kerala[b]	
	Children ever born	Children surviving	Children ever born	Children surviving
15-19	0	0	0.4	0.4
20-24	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2
25-29	1.7	1.7	1.9	1.8
30-34	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.4
35-39	2.8	2.6	3.0	2.9
40-44	3.2	2.8	3.5	3.3
45-49	3.3	3.0	4.3	3.8
Average	2.3	2.2	2.5	2.4

Sources: [a]Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; [b]PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:63.

4.2.4 The pattern of fertility initiation and progress

Among the Vettuvans marriage is the point of entry to a woman's reproductive career. Marriage provides the legitimate right to couples to cohabit and reproduce. In the sample of 308 women (15-49 years) in Engandiyour, women married on average at 19.5 years[12].

4.2.4.1 Time elapsed before the first live birth

Among the Vettuvans, the period between marriage and first birth is relatively brief. The distribution of conception times after marriage is given in the last column of Table 4.7. About 72 per cent of women conceived within the first year of their marriage[13]; 14.5 per cent conceived within 1-2 years of marriage; 5.5 per cent conceived within 2-3 years; 3.5 per cent conceived within 3-4 years, and the remaining 4.2 per cent conceived after 4 years of marriage. Both the waiting time to first conception and mean age at first birth indicate that there was a strong desire among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour to have children soon after marriage.

[12]Chapter 6 gives details about age at marriage.
[13]This matches the mean age at first birth of 20.6 years calculated for the Vettuvans of Engandiyour in this study.

Evidence from the Vettuvan community of Enagandiyour supports this. There was a widespread belief in the community that healthy couples conceived within three to six months of their marriage. If conception was delayed for more than a year after marriage, it was a clear indication to the average Vettuvan that there was some biological problem. Women were generally blamed for inability to conceive. These attitudes were being questioned by the younger generation of girls and women, who had college education; however, the dominant belief among the Vettuvans was that conception mainly depends on a woman's biological ability. Another reason for having the first child soon after marriage was the desire to have grown-up children when parents were old. A higher age at marriage, the changed social and economic situation of the village and the Vettuvans themselves may have influenced the attitudes regarding the timing of first birth. Nevertheless, there was an incentive for women as well as for the couple to have children as soon as possible after marriage[14]. Among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour, therefore, deliberate birth control could not be expected from among those couples who did not have children.

4.2.4.2 Interval between higher-order births (closed birth intervals)

Once having begun childbearing, those Vettuvans who intend to go on to have more children do so relatively promptly. Frequency distributions of conception intervals between different birth orders were calculated by first computing the total elapsed time between successive live births and by subtracting the estimated gestation time of nine months from each one. The results are shown in Table 4.7, for each order, and for an average of all birth orders second to sixth. Table 4.7 shows that the pattern of the distribution does not differ greatly among higher birth orders. This probably indicates that the same sets of forces were responsible for different birth intervals. According to Bogue (1993a:10-62), such a pattern may indicate a lack of planned birth spacing. The most common pattern was that Vettuvan women conceived within two years of the date of previous delivery. For example, in about 62 per cent of the cases the conception time from first birth, and in about 67 per cent of cases the conception time from second and fourth births, occurred within two years. A pattern of this kind may be found in both low and high-contraception populations (Bogue, 1993a). In contrast, according to Bogue, it is the open birth interval that makes it clear whether it is a low or high contraception population.

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[14]In many other communities in India a woman needs to have a son in order to establish her right in her husband's family. Among the Vettuvans no such attitudes are prevalent.

Table 4.7: Percentage distribution of conception times for second and higher order births, Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Elapsed time (years)	Birth orders			Average 2nd -7th	Marriage to first conception
	2nd	3rd	4th[a]		
< 1	23.8	22.0	29.6	23.7	71.6
1-2	37.7	44.7	37.0	40.0	14.5
2-3	18.4	17.9	18.5	18.4	5.5
3-4	6.3	3.2	3.7	5.0	3.5
4+	5.3	5.6	3.7	5.4	4.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Notes:[a]This includes average elapsed time of 5th, 6th, and 7th order births. There are only 4, 2, and 1 births in the category of 5th, 6th and 7th birth orders, respectively.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

The factors that influence a closed birth interval according to Bogue (1993a:10-61) are postpartum amenorrhoea, duration of breastfeeding, postpartum abstinence, health problems of mother and infant, interference with sex exposure, contraception, and sub-fecundity. In the absence of detailed data on these factors it is difficult to assess precisely their effect on the observed birth intervals among the Vettuvan community. However, an approximate assessment is made in this section from available information gathered from the field work and other secondary sources.

Interviews with Vettuvan men and women showed that Vettuvans breastfeed (though with supplementary feeding) for 18-24 months[15]; breastfeeding is universal among the Vettuvans. Since there is a link between breastfeeding and postpartum amenorrhoea, it is most likely that postpartum amenorrhoea may have some influence on the birth intervals by delaying the resumption of ovulation (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995;71-72; Bogue, 1993a:10-61). Breastfeeding becomes more important in determining closed birth intervals when contraception is minimal between two births.

[15]Breastfeeding is the most economical way to feed children. Infant formula is very expensive in Engandiyour: in 1997, one kilogram of infant formula cost about ten Australian dollars, which was equal to two days' wages for a male labourer.

Interviews with Vettuvan men revealed that postpartum abstinence was very common in their community. Traditionally, a woman went to her natal home when she was seven months pregnant and returned to her husband's home three months after delivery[16]. Although such practices were changing by 1997 it was still a common practice among the Vettuvans. Husbands never accompanied their wives during these visits, and visited only occasionally. Whenever the husband stayed in his wife's house after the delivery, he was given a separate room or place to sleep. Often the wife's mother slept in her room. When the women returned to their husbands' house, they were taken care of by their mothers-in-law. It was still common practice that the mother-in-law slept in the room of her daughter-in-law as long as the grandchild was less than a year old. It was believed that mothers-in-law were to assist when need arose in the night. Taboos that restricted men from having sex with their wives who had infants were less common. However, circumstances were, to say the least, unfavourable to the resumption of regular sexual relations within a year after delivery. While it is difficult to assess the effect of these cultural practices on closed birth intervals, it is reasonable to believe that they may have had some influence.

The health problems of mother and infant can also reduce the frequency of sexual relations, and thus result in prolonged birth intervals. In the absence of data on these factors, it will be difficult to assess their role in the length of open birth intervals in this study. However, during the field work we did not encounter any common health problems of mothers and infants among the Vettuvans that seemed to influence the birth intervals. But this possibility cannot be ignored.

Another phenomenon which potentially disrupts sexual relations is migration. However, about 95 per cent of the Vettuvan men who participated in the study both lived and worked in Engandiyour. No woman who participated in the study lived and worked outside the village. Therefore, migration does not seem to have influenced closed birth intervals of Vettuvan women surveyed in this study.

It will be demonstrated in section 4.3.2 on family planning that use of a modern contraceptive method is nearly non-existent among the Vettuvans as a spacing method. However, the role of traditional methods of contraception cannot be disregarded without further investigation[17]. In the absence of data on subfecundity

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[16]On the 90th day after birth children were given their names. This ceremony was conducted at the husband's home and the woman returned to her husband's home a few days before this ceremony.

[17]According to the Kerala NFHS the use of traditional methods of family planning in 1991-92 was

it is not possible to assess its role in the closed birth intervals.

4.2.4.3 Open birth intervals

As mentioned above, data on closed birth intervals are often ambiguous, as similar patterns are often found in populations whose members ultimately have different fertility. Analysis of open intervals overcomes this difficulty. The open birth interval is the time that elapsed between the birth of the last child and the date of interview. Information on open birth intervals revealed from the Vettuvan Wife's Survey is displayed in Table 4.8. If a population is genuinely serious about attaining small family size, there will be a substantial proportion of the women with long open birth intervals, because they have terminated childbearing at some date in the past (Bogue, 1993a:10-62). In analysis of Vettuvan open birth interval data, about 50 per cent of the women had an open birth interval of more than eight years. It can be inferred from this that women have terminated their childbearing at an early age and have been using some form of contraception.

9.1 per cent among the currently married women.

Table 4.8: Per cent distribution of various birth intervals according to time span, Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Time span (years)	Waiting time to conception	closed birth interval (1st to 7th)	Open birth interval	Cumulative per cent of waiting time to conception	Cumulative per cent of closed birth interval	Cumulative per cent of open birth interval
<2	86.1	63.7	14.2	86.1	63.7	14.2
2-3	5.5	18.4	9.3	91.6	82.1	23.5
3-4	3.5	7.6	6.9	95.1	89.7	30.4
4-5	2.1	5.0	3.5	97.2	94.7	33.9
5-6	0.7	1.8	6.5	97.9	96.5	40.4
6-7	1.0	1.4	3.1	98.9	97.9	43.5
7-8	0.4	0.9	3.5	99.3	98.8	47.0
8-9	0.7	1.2	3.5	100.0	100	50.5
9-10	--		3.5	--	--	54.0
10-11	--	--	3.8	--	--	57.8
11-12	--	--	5.2	--	--	63.0
12-13	--	--	4.5	--	--	67.5
13-14	--	--	4.1	--	--	71.6
14-15	--	--	3.4	--	--	75.0
15-16	--	--	4.5	--	--	79.5
16-17	--	--	2.1	--	--	81.6
17-18	--	--	2.7	--	--	84.3
18-19	--	--	2.7	--	--	87.0
19-20	--	--	3.8	--	--	90.8
20+	--	--	9.2	--	--	100.0

Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

Table 4.9 shows the comparison of open birth intervals with conception times for second and higher birth orders. The difference is immediately obvious; practically all (94.7 per cent) of conception times are accounted for within five years, while the open birth interval distribution is much longer. Almost half (46.1 per cent) of open birth intervals are of 10 years or more The concentration of open birth intervals at higher time intervals suggests that there was an accumulation of older and higher-parity women who wished to terminate their childbearing and hence were sterile or were avoiding pregnancy by means of sustained contraception.

Table 4.9: Comparison of per cent distribution of open birth intervals with conception time for closed birth intervals for second and higher-order live births, Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Length of interval (years)	Open interval	Second and higher order births	Difference
<2	14.2	63.7	-49.5
2-3	9.3	18.4	-9.1
3-4	6.9	7.6	-0.7
4-5	3.5	5.0	-1.5
5-6	6.5	1.8	+4.7
6-7	3.1	1.4	+1.7
7-8	3.5	0.9	+2.6
8-9	3.5	1.3	+2.2
9-10	3.5	00	+3.5
10-14	21.0	00	+21.0
14-19	15.9	00	+15.9
20+	9.2	00	+9.2

Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.2.5 Fertility Differentials

4.2.5.1 Fertility variations

While the Vettuvans of Engandiyour form a fairly cohesive group, individual variation is, of course, present. The following sections examine this diversity. The distribution of women according to the number of children they had at the time of survey is given in Table 4.10. There is a concentration of women having two or three children. Nearly three-fifths of women have fewer than two children. The proportion of those women with more than five children is substantially low. About six per cent of women are without children. Thus, fertility appears to be converging to low levels.

Table 4.10: Distribution of Vettuvan women according to the number of children they had at the time of survey, Engandiyour, 1997

Children ever born	No. of women (N=308)	Per cent	Cumulative per cent
0	18	5.8	5.8
1	66	21.5	27.3
2	107	34.7	62.0
3	92	29.9	91.9
4	17	5.6	97.5
5	5	1.6	99.1
6	1	0.3	99.4
7	1	0.3	99.7
8 +	1	0.3	100.0

Note: N=308.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

Table 4.11 shows number of sons and daughters women had at the time of survey. It is evident from the table that there are more male children than female children among the Vettuvans. While about 18 per cent women did not have a son, about 29 per cent did not have a daughter.

Table 4.11: Distribution of Vettuvan women according to the number of sons and daughters they have at the time of survey, Engandiyour, 1997

No. of children	Son (%)	Daughter (%)
0	55 (17.8)	107 (34.7)
1	135 (43.8)	129 (41.9)
2	73 (23.7)	53 (17.2)
3+	27 (8.7)	19 (6.2)

Note: N=308.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.2.5.2 Education and fertility

Table 4.12 shows the educational levels and fertility of Vettuvan women. When illiteracy and lower educational levels were common in the higher age cohorts, fertility seems to have been influenced little by education. For example, while fertility increased with an increase in education in the age group 40-44, fertility decreased with an increase in education in the age group 45-49. When education became more widespread and length of education increased, education seems to have an influence on fertility. For example, in the age cohort 20-24 and 25-29, fertility is significantly lower for those women who have college education than for those who have 10 years or less of schooling. Since we do not know whether women who have college education will have more children at a later stage, we cannot conclude that education really influenced final family size negatively, it may simply be a timing effect. What we can definitely conclude from the age cohorts 40-44 and 45-49 (assuming that they have completed their family size) is that educational improvements from no schooling to less than seven years of schooling had no consistent effect on fertility.

Table 4.12: Average number of children ever born according to educational level and age of Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Years of schooling	Age group of women (years)						All ages
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	
No schooling	--	nc (3)	2.6 (9)	3.3 (6)	3.0 (4)	3.8 (17)	3.2 (39)
1-7 years of schooling	1.4 (23)	1.7 (30)	2.6 (21)	2.8 (40)	3.4 (28)	3.2 (17)	2.5 (158)
8-10 years of schooling	1.4 (25)	1.8 (25)	2.0 (15)	2.7 (12)	nc (6)	nc (3)	1.9 (87)
College education	0.8 (12)	1.3 (6)	nc (2)	nc (1)	na	na	1.2 (21)

Notes: na = no cases in this category; nc = not calculated because of small number of cases;
Figures in brackets indicate numbers of women.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

4.3 Family planning among the Vettuvans

Clearly, to achieve such low levels of fertility the Vettuvans must make extensive use of birth control. The family planning programme[18] operations in the village were carried out by both private and public-sector health institutions. In the public sector, family planning services were provided by nursing staff at the Primary Health Centres and Sub-centres: the nursing staff mainly provided oral pills and condoms to clients; sterilisation operations and IUD (Intra-uterine device) insertions were performed by doctors. In the private sector, all three hospitals provided family planning services. The role of private-sector institutions in family planning in this village was very significant. Deliveries of most babies took place in the village private hospitals. Although there are no statistics readily available to support this view, my experience, observations and interviews with health workers revealed that villagers preferred to go to a private hospital in the village rather than a public hospital about 10-15 kilometres away from the village. This was mostly due to lack of family support-related factors. In 1997 families had very few unoccupied family members who could attend deliveries and provide all kinds of support. This reason was common not only for deliveries but also for other medical treatments.

4.3.1 Ever-users of modern family planning

Table 4.13 shows ever-use of family planning among the currently married surveyed women[19] in Engandiyour in 1997. About 71 per cent of currently married women were ever-users of a modern contraceptive method[20]. According to the Kerala 1992-93 NFHS, the percentage of ever-users among the currently married women was 64.2 (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:81). In the Vettuvan community of Engandiyour, about 66 per cent of the currently married women were ever-users of a modern permanent family planning method, and about 6 per cent a modern temporary family planning method. Switch-over or change in contraceptives was reported only in two cases.

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[18]Family planning data documented in this paragraph are compiled from the data collected by the family planning programme nurses of the village.
[19]This includes methods that are specific to men, such as condom and vasectomy.
[20]This study did not collect information about traditional methods of family planning.

No currently married woman in the age group 15-19 had ever used a modern contraceptive method. These young women did not have any children. This confirms the claim made in section 4.2.4.1 that couples did not like to delay their first child, and that contraceptive use may be non-existent. However, nearly half of the women in the age group 20-24 were ever-users of a modern family planning method or methods. The percentage of ever-users increased in the subsequent age groups and reached a level of 86.5 per cent for the age group 45-49. In general, the ever-use of a modern method of family planning increased with age, becoming more-or-less universal by the later years of reproduction.

Ever-use of a permanent family planning method was about 34 per cent among the currently married women in the age group 20-24, and about 51 per cent in the age group 25-29. In these two age groups, all users of the permanent family planning methods were women (no male sterilisation was reported). In the age group 30-34 the ever-users of a permanent family planning method amounted to about 79 per cent, a substantially higher percentage compared to the previous age cohorts. For the age groups 35-39 and above, the percentage of ever-use of permanent methods was between 83 and 86 per cent. Among the users of permanent family planning methods in the higher age groups, from 30-34 and above, men also became involved. For example, in the age group 45-49, 35 per cent of the sterilisation adopters were men.

The temporary methods of family planning used by Vettuvans in the study were IUD, condom, and oral pills. Ever-users of temporary methods were about 6 per cent of total users of family planning among the Vettuvan women. A greater percentage of users of temporary methods was found in the younger cohorts than the older. For example, nearly 14 per cent of the couples in the age group 20-24 had used a temporary method, None in the age cohort 40-44 and above had ever used a temporary method.

The analysis presented above suggests two conclusions. First, permanent family planning methods dominate over temporary methods among the ever-users of modern family planning methods. And second, while some of the ever-users of permanent family planning methods in the older age groups were men, virtually all permanent users in the younger age cohorts were women.

Table 4.13: Percentage of currently married Vettuvan women, who (or whose husband) had ever used a modern contraceptive method, by specific method and age, Engandiyour, 1997

Age (years)	Percentage ever used a modern family planning method	Percentage of ever-users of a modern permanent family planning method		Total percentage of ever-users of a permanent family planning method	Percentage of ever-users of a modern temporary family planning method			Total percentage of ever-users of a temporary family planning method	Percentage of never-users of a modern family planning method	Total per cent	Total number of women
		Female sterilisation	Male sterilisation		Oral pills	Condom	Cu.T (IUD)				
15-19	–	–	–	–	–	–		--	100.0	100.0	4
20-24	47.5	33.9	–	33.9	–	6.8	6.8	13.6	52.5	100.0	59
25-29	60.3	50.8	–	50.8	3.2	1.6	4.8	9.6	39.7	100.0	63
30-34	80.9	72.3	6.5	78.8	2.1	–	–	2.1	19.1	100.0	47
35-39	82.8	77.5	5.3	82.8	–	–	1.7	--	17.2	101.7[a]	58
40-44	82.5	55.0	27.5	82.5	–	–	–	--	17.5	100.0	40
45-49	86.5	51.4	35.1	86.5	–	–	–	--	13.5	100.0	37
All ages	70.5	55.6	9.7	65.3	1.0	1.6	2.9	5.5	29.5	100.3[a]	308

Notes: [a]There is multiple ever use (switch-over) of contraception in this category.
– indicates no cases.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

4.3.2. Current users of modern family planning methods

The current users of family planning methods among the currently married women[21] are shown in Table 4.14. The majority of the currently married women who had ever used a modern contraceptive method were currently using a method. This is precisely because most of the ever-users were adopters of a permanent family planning method (see Table 4.13). Current use of contraception in the Vettuvan community in 1997 was about 68 per cent, with about 65 per cent of women practising a modern permanent contraceptive method and about three per cent using a modern temporary method of family planning[22]. The current use of a modern contraceptive among currently married women in Kerala according to the Kerala NFHS in 1992-93 was 54 per cent: 48 per cent using a permanent method and 6 per cent using a temporary method of family planning (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:83).

Since there will be usually no difference in proportion between ever-users and current users of permanent contraceptives, the difference in the ever-use and current use is due to changes in the number of women using temporary methods of family planning. Current users of temporary methods of family planning were only half the number of the ever-users. Only about 6 per cent of the 308 currently married women in the Vettuvan community in Engandiyour have ever used a temporary family planning method.

The discussion of current and ever-users of modern family planning methods above leads to the following conclusions. First, there is limited use of more than one method of family planning among the Vettuvans. Secondly, sterilisation operations dominate both ever- and current use of family planning methods. Thirdly, female sterilisations are more common than male sterilisations. Fourthly, temporary methods of family planning are not very popular in the community.

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[21]This includes methods that are specific to men, such as vasectomy and condom.

[22]According to the data compiled by the health workers of the village for the fiscal year 1996-97 (not published), the major method of family planning adopted by villagers was postpartum sterilisation; about 92 per cent of the adopters of family planning were sterilisation users and the remaining 8 per cent Cu.T (IUD), condom, and oral pill users. The total current family planning use status in the village in the fiscal year 1996-97 was around 60 per cent.

Table 4.14: Percentage of currently married women, who (or whose husband) currently using a modern contraceptive method, by specific method and age, Vettuvan, Engandiyour, 1997

Age (years)	Percentage of current users of a modern family planning method	Percentage of current users of a modern permanent family planning method		Total percentage of current users of permanent family planning method	Percentage of current users of a modern temporary family planning method			Total percentage of current users of a modern temporary family planning method	Percentage of current non-users of a modern family planning method	Total number of women
		Female sterilisation	Male sterilisation		Oral pills	Condom	Cu.T (IUD)			
15-19	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	100.0	4
20-24	45.8	33.8	–	33.8	–	5.1	6.8	11.9	54.2	59
25-29	52.4	50.8	–	50.8	1.6	–	–	1.6	47.6	63
30-34	80.8	72.3	6.4	78.7	2.1	–	–	2.1	19.1	47
35-39	82.8	77.6	5.2	82.8	–	–	–	–	17.2	58
40-44	82.5	55.0	27.5	82.5	–	–	–	–	17.5	40
45-49	86.5	51.4	35.1	86.5	–	–	–	–	13.5	37
All ages	68.5	55.8	9.7	65.5	0.6	1.0	1.3	2.9	31.5	308

Note: – indicates no cases.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

4.3.3 Age at the time of sterilisation

The age at which women adopt a permanent family planning method (or, women's age at the time of husband's sterilisation) is an important indicator of the fertility status of a population. As sterilisation is considered a permanent family planning method, age at sterilisation, generally, denotes age at the end of reproduction[23]. Although sterilisation is reversible, this is done only in very rare cases. In our study sample no such case was reported[24].

Tables 4.15 and 4.16 show the distribution of women according to their age at sterilisation or at the time of their husband's sterilisation. Table 4.15 shows that slightly more than half of those women who adopted a permanent family planning method did so before 25 years of age; and the percentage of those sterilised before 30 years of age was nearly 85. An examination of age at sterilisation of the cohorts 40-44 and 45-49 indicates that there was a shift in the age at sterilisation towards earlier ages. For example, in the age cohort 45-49, 47 per cent of the women were sterilised when they were less than 30 years of age, whereas in the age cohort 40-44, nearly 68 per cent of women were sterilised at under 30 years of age. This indicates that age at female sterilisation has been declining among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour village.

The mean age at female sterilisation among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour was 25.5 years, while the mean age of sterilisation of men was 28.4 years. One of the reasons for the lower age at sterilisation of women could be the practice of postpartum sterilisations. Our interviews with health workers of the village revealed that postpartum sterilisation was common among the Vettuvans. Female sterilisations (tubectomies) were done either while the women were undergoing delivery by caesarean section, or a few days after delivery. Interviews with Vettuvan men and women revealed that they believed that if both delivery and sterilisation occur at the same time it is convenient for the family to take care of the woman. As families were becoming smaller, there was less family support available. Lack of family support was felt by women in the study. Since many deliveries were done by caesarean section, sterilisation had become easier. In fact, doctors in the study village recommended women to undergo sterilisation if their deliveries were to be

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[23]Effectiveness of sterilisation is considered as 95 per cent or higher.

[24]A health worker reported one case where an Ezava woman underwent an operation to reverse her sterilisation.

done by caesarean section. Although exact statistics were not available, there was a growing concern in the village about the increasing number of deliveries by caesarean section.

A higher mean age at sterilisation of men compared to women may be for the following reasons. (i) Men were sterilised according to both social and economic convenience. For example, men did not opt for sterilisation during the summer, when they obtained plenty of work. Similarly, during important festival seasons, or when they observe certain religious traditions that last for months at a time, sterilisation operations were often deferred. (ii) No husbands of currently married women below 30 years had undergone vasectomy (see Tables 4.14 and 4.16). This means that those who had already undergone vasectomy represented older cohorts and thus show past trends, while age at female sterilisation gives more recent trends in age at sterilisation. (iii) This may be influenced by the difference in age at marriage of husbands and wives.

To sum up, whatever the immediate determining factors, age at sterilisation is very low among the Vettuvans and thus plays a significant role in ensuring low fertility

Table 4.15: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan women according to their age at tubectomy, Engandiyour, 1997

Current age of women (years)	Age at the time of women's sterilisation (years)					Number of sterilised women
	<20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	
			(%)			
20-24	10.0	90.0	--	--	--	20
25-29	3.1	53.1	43.8	--	--	32
30-34	--	52.9	35.3	11.8	--	34
35-39	2.2	51.1	35.6	8.8	2.2	45
40-44	4.5	22.7	40.9	18.2	13.6	22
45-49	--	26.3	21.0	31.5	21.0	19
All ages	2.9	48.8	32.6	10.5	5.2	172

Note: Mean age at sterilisation = 25.5 years.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

Table 4.16: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan women according to their age at the time of their husband's vasectomy, Engandiyour, 1997

Current age of wife (years)	Wife's age at the time of her husband's sterilisation				Total number of sterilised men
	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	
30-34	75.0	25.0	–	–	3
35-39	75.0	–	25.0	–	3
40-44	18.2	54.5	27.3	–	11
45-49	7.6	46.1	23.1	23.1	13
All ages	23.3	43.3	23.3	10.0	30

Notes: Mean age of wives at the time of their husbands' vasectomy operation = 27.8 years;
Mean age of sterilisation of husbands = 28.4 years.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.3.4 Number of living children at the time of first contraceptive use

The impression from earlier sections that Vettuvans tend to bear their children quite soon after marriage, then immediately get sterilised, is confirmed by an examination of the number of living children at the time of first use of contraception for currently married women. This is shown in Table 4.17, which suggests that about 96 per cent of currently married women adopted a permanent family planning method as their first method of family planning. In the Vettuvans of Engandiyour 45 per cent of women had one or two living children at the time of tubectomy as their first method of contraception. Similarly nearly 88 per cent women had three or fewer children at the time of tubectomy as their first method of contraception. The mean number of children women had at the time of tubectomy as their first method of contraception was 2.8.

About 57 per cent of men had two living children at the time of vasectomy as their first method of contraception. No man accepted vasectomy as his first method of contraception when he had one child. The mean number of children men had at the time of vasectomy as their first method of contraception was 2.5.

Among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour temporary methods as their first method of contraception were in general used when couples had one child or no children.

Table 4.17: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan acceptors of various family planning methods according to the number of living children they had at the time of first contraceptive use, Engandiyour, 1997

Family planning method	Number of living children						Mean no. children	Number of women
	0	1	2	3	4	5+		
Tubectomy	–	2.4	43.5	41.8	7.6	4.7	2.8	172
Vasectomy	–	–	56.7	36.7	3.3	3.3	2.5	30
Cu.T (IUD)	–	100	–	–	–	–	nc	4
Oral Pill	–	50	–	50	–	–	nc	2
Condom	25	75	–	–	–	–	nc	3
All methods	0.5	3.8	44.1	40.3	7.1	4.3	2.6	211

Notes: nc = not calculated; – indicates no cases.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.3.5 Adoption of a permanent family planning method and sex composition of a couple's children

In many societies the sex combination of sibling sets is regarded as a significant issue. This section considers its role for the Vettuvans. Table 4.18 shows the proportion of women (or husbands) who adopted a permanent family planning method after having children with a particular sex composition. Among the currently married women who adopted a permanent family planning method the most common sex composition was one son and one daughter. A quarter of the women were in this category. The next most common sex combinations were two sons and a daughter, and two sons. These two categories together accounted for another quarter of the respondents.

Among those women who had adopted a permanent family planning method 43.4 per cent had done so with one son; 32.7 with two sons; 11.7 with three sons; 0.5 with four sons; 0.9 per cent with five sons; and 9 per cent with no sons. Thus, about nine-tenths of the couples who had adopted a permanent family planning method had at least one son.

Among currently married women who adopted a permanent family planning method 24.7 had done so without a daughter; 43 per cent with one daughter; 19.4 per cent with two daughters; and 12.1 per cent with three or more daughters. The small size of the data set produces more subtle analysis of this issue here. But, at first view, there is no evidence of strong sex preference. The matter is considered below when assessing future fertility intentions.

Table 4.18: Percentage of Vettuvan women (or husbands) sterilised, according to sex composition of children, Engandiyour, 1997

Number of sons	Number of daughters				Total per cent
	0	1	2	3 +	
0	0	1.8	3.4	5.1	10.3
1	2.3	25.0	11.0	5.1	43.4
2	13.0	13.6	4.3	1.9	32.8
3 or more	9.7	2.9	0.9	–	13.5
Total per cent	25.0	43.3	19.6	12.1	100

Note: N=192.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.3.6 Reasons for not using a modern contraceptive method

Although sterilisation becomes a virtually universal aspect of life, there are some women who do not use contraception. Those women who were not currently using a modern contraceptive were asked reasons for non-use. Various reasons are shown in Table 4.19. The major reason for currently not using a modern contraceptive was their desire to have more children. Nearly three-fifths of the women reported this reason. These women had not completed their families. Thus, these women may use a family planning method in future, once their families are complete. Menopause and inability to conceive were the next important set of reasons reported for the non-use of contraception: nearly a quarter of the women who did not use contraception gave this reason for their non-use. Matters related to poor health, absence of husband, postpartum amenorrhoea, and pregnancy were another set of reasons for non-use of contraception. All these account for slightly over one-tenth of the non-users. The above information suggests that there is little unmet need for family planning among the Vettuvans: less than two per cent.

Table 4.19: Distribution of Vettuvan women's reasons for not using a modern contraceptive method, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons for not using	Number	Per cent
Need more children[a]	57	58.7
Menopause or secondary sterility	24	24.7
Husband away	4	4.1
Poor health	4	4.1
Do not like any family planning method	2	2.1
Postpartum amenorrhoea	4	4.1
Pregnant	2	2.1
Total	97	100.0

Note: [a]This includes 18 women who did not have children. Total number of women using a family planning method = 211.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997.

4.3.7 Future use of family planning

Future intention of Vettuvan women in Engandiyour to use a modern family planning method is given in Table 4.20. According to the table about three-fifths of the women who were currently not using a family planning method indicated that they would use a modern family planning method in future. Slightly less than one-third indicated that they would not use any modern family planning method in the future, and the rest were undecided.

Among those who indicated that they would not use a modern contraceptive in the future were women who had reached menopause, were sterile, or in poor health. Women who were undecided about the future use of contraception included women who did not like family planning methods, whose husbands were away, were pregnant, or were breastfeeding.

Of those who wished to use a family planning method in future, when asked about the method they would use, about three-fifths indicated that they would choose female sterilisation; about one-tenth said they would use Cu.T (IUD); the rest were undecided about the method they would use in the future (Table 4.21). Those women who intended to adopt sterilisation indicated they would do so once they completed their families. Those who reported that they would use Cu.T (IUD), on

the other hand, would do so after the first birth. Those who were undecided about the method were undecided about the timing as well.

Table 4.20: Vettuvan women's future intention to use a modern family planning method, Engandiyour, 1997

Intention to use contraception in future	Number of women	Per cent
Yes	57	58.8
No	28	28.9
Undecided	12	12.4
Total	97	100

Note: 211 women use a family planning method.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

Table 4.21: Vettuvan women's intention to use specific methods of family planning, Engandiyour, 1997

Methods for future use	Number	Per cent
Female sterilisation	35	61.4
Cu.T (IUD)	5	8.8
Undecided	17	29.8
Total	57	100

Note: Women (no. 40) who had no intention to use family planning excluded from the table.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

4.4 Fertility Preferences

4.4.1 Desire for additional children

Vettuvan women who had at least one child or were pregnant were asked about their desire for an additional child. Similarly men who had at least one child were asked about their desire for additional children. About 18 per cent of the women and men said that they did not want an additional child. Various reasons for wanting additional children among those who desired additional children are given in Table 4.22. About three-fifths of women and slightly more men desired an additional child because they had only one child. Slightly over a quarter of women

and about one-third of men wanted an additional child because they wanted a daughter. Similarly, slightly less than a quarter of women and less than one-tenth of men wanted a son as an additional child.

Table 4.22: Reasons for wanting additional children among Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons	Men		Women	
	Number	Per cent[a]	Number	Per cent[a]
Only one child, need more	31	65.9	33	60.0
Need daughter	17	36.2	15	27.3
Need son	4	8.5	13	23.6
Two children necessary	4	8.5	6	10.9
Others[b]	3	6.4	4	7.3
Total number of women/men	55		47	

Notes: Reasons for wanting additional children were asked only of those desiring additional children. [a]Percentage exceeds 100 owing to multiple responses; [b]fear of death, fear of children becoming disobedient.

Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

The desire of Vettuvan women and men for additional sons according to the number of living sons is shown in Table 4.23. Among the women who had no son, everyone desired one son. Of those who had one son, nearly two-fifths wanted no additional son, and the remainder wanted one more son. Among women who had two or more sons, about four-fifths did not want an additional son, and the remainder wanted one more.

Among men who had no son, about nine-tenths wanted a son; one-tenth wanted two sons. However, among those who had one son, about three-fifths wanted no son and the remainder wanted two sons. About four-fifths of men who had two or more sons did not want any son and the remainder wanted one son.

Table 4.23: Percentage distribution of number of sons of Vettuvan women according to desire for sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Desired number of sons	Number of sons at the time of survey					
	0	1	2 or more	0	1	2 or more
	women			men		
None	–	43	80	–	58	80
1	100	57	20	90	42	20
2	–	–	–	10	–	–
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of women	4	46	5	14	28	5

Note: Number of women 55, of men 47.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

Table 4.24 shows the desire for daughters according to the number of daughters Vettuvan women and men already had. Among the women who did not have a daughter, nearly three-quarters wanted a daughter, and the remaining quarter did not want a daughter. Those women who had one or more daughters did not want an additional daughter. This clearly suggests that this group of women wanted a maximum of one daughter.

Among men who did not have a daughter, about 86 per cent wanted a daughter and the remainder did not. Of those men who had one daughter, 70 per cent did not want an additional daughter and the remainder wanted one more.

Table 4.24: Percentage distribution of number of daughters of Vettuvan men and women according to their desire for daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Desired number of daughters	Number of daughters at the time of survey					
	0	1	2 or more	0	1	2 or more
	women			men		
0	26	100	–	14	70	100
1	74	--	–	86	30	–
Total	100	100	–	100	100	100
No. of women/men	48	7	–	29	17	1

Note: Number of women 55, of men 47; – indicates no case.
Source: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997.

Tables 4.23 and 4.24 indicate a clear but not a huge preference for sons over daughters among Vettuvan men and women who wanted additional children. What seems important from the two tables is the decreasing trend to have children with the same sex. For example the vast majority of the women and men do not want an additional son if they have one or two sons already. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of men and women did not want an additional daughter if they already had one or two.

4.4.2 Ideal number of children

In order to determine the ideal number of children a Vettuvan couple should have, an appropriate question was asked in the Vettuvan Wife's and Vettuvan Husband's Survey. The ideal number is the number that is considered necessary for the social and economic well-being of a Vettuvan family. The mean ideal number of children reported by both Vettuvan men and women in the study was 2.3 children (Table 4.25). The most preferred sex combination was one son and one daughter. However, there was a preference for male children over female children; that is, the mean ideal number of sons was slightly higher than that of daughters.

Table 4.26 indicates that the actual number of children the respondents had influenced the ideal number only marginally. For example, men and women who did not have any children had an average of 2.1 children as ideal; the ideal was 2.5 for those who had more than four children. Clearly, the number of children the Vettuvans considered necessary for the social and economic welfare of their

families in 1997 was around two. Analysis here and in the previous section provides an indication that a 'number preference' is emerging among the Vettuvans, along with the preference for son and daughter. Vettuvans in this study wanted roughly two children; they also wanted one son and one daughter; if they had two sons, they did want more children of any sex; if they had two daughters, they did not want any more children of any sex. This issue will be considered for further discussion in Chapter 7.

Table 4.25: Percentage distribution of ideal number of sons and daughters among the Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Ideal number	Sons	Daughters	Sons+Daughters
0	1.7	2.1	0.2
1	71.0	92.7	0.7
2	24.4	3.5	70.5
3 or more	0.5	0.2	27.4
Others[a]	1.6	1.6	1.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean	1.258	1.032	2.305

Notes: N=577; [a]Did not give a numerical answer.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

Table 4.26: Distribution of actual and ideal number of children, Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Living children	Mean ideal number of children
0	2.1
1	2.2
2	2.3
3+	2.5
Total	2.3

Note: N=577 (husbands and wives).
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

4.5 Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this chapter suggests that there has been a transition in fertility to a very low level from a moderately high level during the last five decades among the Vettuvans of Engandiyour village. There is clear evidence in this study that sterilisation, particularly tubectomy, is the single most important method of contraception. There is an increasing trend to achieve the required family size as early as possible after marriage and then to adopt a permanent family planning method. Although there is son preference, the couples in this study seem not to have continued childbearing indefinitely to have a son. Rather, they stopped bearing children once the family size norm was achieved. Thus, family size has had an important role in determining the cessation of childbearing among the Vettuvans.

The purpose of this chapter has been to document unambiguously the user-specific nature of the fertility of the Vettuvans. With these now clearly delineated, we can move on to a consideration of the wider social and economic position in Kerala's modern society. That is the focus of the following three chapters.

Chapter 5

Micro Institutional Environment: Caste-System Changes and the Status of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 documented the fertility and family planning characteristics of the Vettuvans. With those now clearly delineated, the purpose of this chapter and the next two is to explain the low levels of fertility revealed in Chapter 4. As a part of the top-down approach adopted in this study, this chapter is intended to provide the micro-level institutional environment. Such information is important because it has bearing on the security and mobility costs and benefits of children. In this study the micro-level institutional environment primarily means information about the study village and community. The village-level information includes the village's administration, population, population density, settlement pattern, religion and caste, caste system, education, economy, transport, and housing. The details concerning the Vettuvans specifically include historical information, population and its distribution in Engandiyour, economic characteristics, and educational and occupational structure. This micro-level institutional environment has close links, of course, with the institutional environment in Kerala more generally, discussed in Chapter 2.

5.2 Engandiyour village

Engandiyour is a coastal village. It is situated about 24 kilometres west of Trichur, the district headquarters. Its western border is the Arabian Sea; the northern and eastern borders are the Chetuwa river, and the southern border is Vadanapally village. In 1997 Engandiyour had 10 administrative wards, each with a population of 2,000-2,500. The village has two divisions, Kundaliyour and Engandiyour. The

local government of Engandiyour is called Engandiyour Village Gramapanchayath (village council), consisting of the Panchayath President and other elected members. Each ward has an elected member to the village Panchayath and the 10 elected members chose the village Panchayath President. The village Panchayath was established in 1949. Since 1964, the village Gramapanchayath has been under the leadership of left-wing parties (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:8). The Government of India Panchyathiraj Act of 1995 had provided more power to the village Panchayaths to plan, implement and monitor various development programmes in the village. Under this plan each village will identify its problems, prioritise them, identify possible solutions and work out a plan to implement such solutions in the form of developmental projects. Under this system the local administration (government staff) will be accountable to the village Panchayath (elected members of village council). In 1997 Engandiyour made substantial progress in implementing the Panchyathiraj recommendations[1].

Administratively, the village is under the village officer, who is in charge of the village administration. Above the village officer is the *taluk* head, or *thahasildar,* and then the collector at the district level. It is the village-level administration which confirms the economic and social position of any member of the village for any economic or educational privileges. For example, the village officer certifies the income level of a family in order for them to receive economic assistance of any kind from the state and central governments. Any privilege based on caste also has to be certified by the village officer. The local administration is responsible for the collection of property and revenue taxes. They provide maintenance for Panchayath roads and other facilities. They also implement government programmes which need to be administered through the village.

5.2.1 Population, population density and settlement pattern

The population-related details of Engandiyour are given in Table 5.1. As can be seen from the table, in 1991 the population of Engandiyour village was 20,756 persons. The population of Engandiyour grew by about 53 per cent from 1961 to 1991. Table 5.1 also indicates that from 1971, the growth rate of the population has been declining. The sex ratio of the village population during 1961 to 1991 has been less than 100 men for every 100 women (Director of Census Operations, 1991:90). In 1991 there were about 86 men for every 100 women in Engandiyour. Thus, the population growth and sex ratio of population in Engandiyour resembles

[1]Based on my communication with Panchayath staff.

the all-Kerala situation discussed in Chapter 3.

Given the land area of 14.12 square kilometres in Engandiyour, the population density was 1469 persons per square kilometre in 1991 (Director of Census Operations, 1991:90). This is about double the population density of Kerala, which was 749 persons per square kilometre in 1991. The concept of population density can, of course, be misleading as it incorporates the entire land area: agricultural, non-agricultural, and residential areas. The density of population is most relevantly considered within the housing area of the village. Adding agricultural area outside the inhabited boundaries of the village will give a lower density when people may be living in a highly crowded situation. If we consider such an indicator of density we see that people in Engandiyour live in less crowded circumstances than do people in other states where the settlement pattern is very different. Thus, despite the high population density in the village, Engandiyour is not an overcrowded village, as it might seem from the density *per se*.

Table 5.1: Population of Engandiyour village, Kerala, 1961-1991

Year	Male	Female	Total	% intercensal growth rate (decadal)	Sex ratio: males per 100 females
1961[a]	6,330	7,216	13,546	–	87.7
1971[b]	7,531	8,614	16,145	19.2	87.4
1981[c]	8,372	10,003	18,382	13.9	83.7
1991[d]	9,579	11,177	20,756	12.9	85.7

Source: [a]Superintendent of Census Operations, 1966:62; [b]Director of Census Operations, 1974:144; [c]Director of Census Operations, 1981:100; [d]Director of Census Operations, 1991:90.

The settlement pattern in the village resembles that of the rest of Kerala. Houses were built in a pattern which allows each house to have its own garden. Depending upon the economic position of each family the area of garden-land varies from less than two cents to over an acre. In Engandiyour, there was no segregation of scheduled caste houses from the rest of the village. There was no particular part of the village exclusively occupied by any particular community: the location of the household could not give any clue about the caste or religious identity of its members. As will be seen, the settlement pattern and the population density in the village are important aspects in the determination of household strategies,

including fertility.

5.2.2 Religion, caste and caste system

The village is a mixture of Hindus, Christians and Muslims. Since village-level statistics on religion are not readily available, I used records of Primary Health Centres to estimate the religious composition. The records indicate that in 1997 about 65 per cent of the population in Engandiyour was Hindu[2], 20 per cent Christian and about 15 per cent Muslim.

The major castes in the village were Namboodiri, Nair, Ezavan, Mukkuvan, Valan, Kurup, Asari, Panikkar, Panan, Vettuvan, Parayan, Mannan, Nayadi, and Pulayan. Of these, Vettuvan, Parayan, Pulayan, Nayadi, and Mannan are scheduled castes. According to the 1991 Census information the percentage of scheduled castes in Engandiyour was 23.6 per cent or 4893 persons (Director of Census Operations, 1991:90). In 1981, the percentage of scheduled castes in Engandiyour was 23.5 per cent or 4292 persons. The intercensal growth rate for the scheduled castes in the 1981-91 decade was 14 per cent.

Until the early decades of the twentieth century, social and economic relationships in Engandiyour were determined by the caste system (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:7). According to senior villagers, 'untouchability' and 'unapproachability' prevailed in Engandiyour until the early years of the twentieth century. Interviews with senior members of scheduled castes of the village revealed that they were 'untouchables' and 'unapproachables' to Nairs, and 'untouchables' to Ezavas. In Engandiyour such practices were prevalent until about the mid-1930s. The forces that abolished 'untouchability' and 'unapproachability' from the village are difficult to establish from the information collected through interviews because the respondents had little detailed knowledge about such customs. In addition no literature on caste-system changes in the village is available. It is reasonable, however, to assume that the major forces such as the educational activities of Christian missionaries and lower-caste reformers must have influenced the caste-system practices in the village before the 1950s.

There is no precise information about practices of forced labour, slavery, and the ban on breastcloths in the twentieth century in Engandiyour; it is likely that such

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[2]All scheduled castes in the village were Hindus.

practices disappeared from the village in the late nineteenth century. Although untouchability and unapproachability were abolished from the village during the 1930s, many social and economic relations remained unchanged until the 1970s. These included tenancy and high rent; non-entry for scheduled castes to the upper-caste temples; non-entry for scheduled castes into upper-caste houses; Vettuvans not dining with the upper castes; and scheduled castes not invited to the upper castes' social functions. How these constraints have changed in the Vettuvan community is discussed in the following sections.

5.2.3 Health

Good health and hygiene practices have long been a part of the lifestyle in Engandiyour. The traditions of having a bath in the morning, particularly when one is attending prayers, and cleaning both the inside and outside of the house every morning are examples of this. The settlement pattern and availability of plentiful water are conditions favouring better health practices.

Before the modern system of medicine became available, the villagers had a strong tradition of Ayurveda, the indigenous system of medicine. Some of the most famous Ayurveda scholars were from this village, and Ayurvedic practice has been an important branch of medical practice in the village (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:28). In 1997 there was one public Ayurvedic clinic in the village. Allopathy (Modern or Western Medicine) has become very popular, particularly for those with urgent medical needs. In 1997 there were three hospitals and one clinic in the village with inpatient facilities. These hospitals also provided specialised services in almost all branches of medicine. These hospitals and the clinic were in the private sector. In the public sector, there was one Primary Health Centre (PHC) and four Sub-Primary Health Centres. The Primary Health Centre was manned by a medical doctor, while nurses took care of Sub-centres. The doctor from the PHC made regular visits to the four Sub-centres to examine patients.

Family welfare services such as maternal and child health (MCH) and family planning (FP) services were provided primarily through the network of public health service outlets such as Primary Health Centres and Sub-centres. There were 19 Anganvadi centres functioning in the village under the Integrated Child Development Programme[3]. These centres provided all children under the age of

[3]Programme of Government of India to provide a wide range of health, nutritional and recreational activities for children of pre-school age.

five with food, health check-ups, recreation, and advice on immunisation and other health aspects.

According to the immunisation data for 1997-98 fiscal year, the coverage of immunisation in the village above 90 per cent for all vaccines. For example, the BCG coverage was 95 per cent, first DPT dose 99 per cent, and first polio dose 94 per cent. In the case of tetanus toxide (TT) immunisation for pregnant women, the coverage was 97 per cent during the fiscal year 1997-98.

The health status of the village, as indicated by the death rate, infant deaths, and number of maternal deaths suggests that the village has good health standards (Table 5.2). Effective institutional delivery, good nutrition, a decreasing number of higher-order births, prenatal and postnatal care, and the accessibility and affordability of health services may be some of the reasons for the notable achievements in health such as low infant and maternal death rates in the village.

Table 5.2: Some health indicators of Engandiyour village, 1995-96

Death rate in one-year period 1995-96 (per 1000 population)	Number of infant deaths reported in one year during 1995-96	Number of maternal deaths in one year during 1995-96
4.9	1	0

Note: The report does not indicate the exact duration of the rates and incidences referred to. The duration given in the table is based on my discussion with some of the people involved in the preparation of the report.
Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:31.

5.2.4 Transport

Engandiyour has a very good network of roads. In 1996 the total length of roads in the village was 44.8 kilometres (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:40). The National Highway 17 (NH 17) passed through the village. Public and private transport was widely available. In 1997, buses were available to nearby towns almost every five minutes. About 40 taxi cars and 70 auto-three-wheelers were available for public use. The nearest railway station was about 10-12 kilometres away. The international airport at Calicut and domestic airport at Cochin are only 2-3 hours' journey by bus. In 1999, an international airport was opened near

Trichur, the district headquarters. It takes about an hour to get to the new international airport from the village.

5.2.5 Housing

Information on housing within the village is limited, but the available statistics on roofing type give some idea of the improvement in housing standards over recent decades. In the 1950s, almost all houses in the village were either huts or houses with mud walls and roofs of coconut-leaf thatch (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:46). Interviews with elderly villagers revealed that only a very few houses of the upper castes had tiled roofs in the 1950s. As revealed in Table 5.3, on the other hand in 1996, about 42 per cent of the houses in the village had a concrete roof, about 27 per cent of houses had a tiled roof and the remaining 31 per cent had a coconut-thatched roof (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:68). In 1991, the density of houses in the village was 274 per square kilometre (Director of Census Operations, 1991).

Table 5.3: Type of roof of house, Engandiyour, Kerala, 1996

Concrete	Tiled	Coconut-leaf thatch	Total
2668 (42.2)	1706(27.0)	1952(30.8)	6326 (100)

Note: Figures in brackets indicate percentages.
Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:68.

5.2.6 Education

The village has a long tradition of education. The first school was established in 1895 by a local man. In 1961 there were two high schools, two middle schools, two primary schools and four pre-schools (Director of Census Operations, 1961:93). In 1997, in the public sector, the village had two high schools, four upper primary[4] schools and four lower primary[5] schools. A total of 4,259 students attended these schools in 1995 in classes ranging from first to tenth grade (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:26). In 1997, in the private sector, there

[4]Schools with classes up to seventh grade.
[5]Schools with classes up to fourth grade.

was one English-medium[6] primary school with a student enrolment of about 100 (personal communication with the principal). In 1997 there was one computer training institute, two commerce institutes, one parallel college, seven tuition centres and five nursery schools. No higher-education centres were available in the village, but such facilities were available within 15 kilometres of any part of village. The district headquarters, Trichur, had some important educational centres such as a medical college, an agricultural university, and many other colleges under both public and private ownership.

One of the latest developments in Kerala's education in general and that of Engandiyour in particular has been the shift in the choice of school from Malayalam-medium to English-medium schools. The Gulf migration probably changed the attitudes of middle and lower-middle class people towards the good communication skills needed for better employment prospects. It may be noted here that a good proportion of Gulf migrants were not fluent in English, and that many have had difficulties in seeking employment and dealing with every aspect of migration (Gulati, 1983). English proficiency is rational, therefore, from the point of view of migrants who in 1997 had the economic capability to send their children to full-fee-paying English-medium schools. Between eight and nine in the morning private school buses can be seen going to each corner of the village taking students to schools located 5-20 kilometres away. This scene would have been unthinkable 15 or 20 years ago.

In the late 1990s the growth of English-medium schools has been a clear threat to the local Malayalam-medium schools. Fewer students were enrolled each year in the local schools. Added to this phenomenon was the impact of the lower birth rate. In the village schools several divisions of one grade have been cancelled during the last five years; teachers have been transferred or lost their jobs[7]. These local schools which once played a very significant role in education are now less significant. Most of the students at local schools in 1995 came from the economically backward families in and around the village (see Table 5.4). While people in the village accept on patriotic grounds that they should send their children to the local schools, they see that English-medium schools can give their children a better future. They have experienced how important English is for a highly migratory society. It seems hard to reverse this trend, whatever the state political leaders may wish.

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[6]Where the instruction is in English.
[7]Based on personal communication from staff and managers of various schools.

Table 5.4: Percentage distribution of scheduled-caste children in various schools in Engandiyour, 1995.

Name of school	Total Students	Number of SC students	% of SC students to total students
Thirunarayana L.P School	296	90	30
St. Mary's L.P School	161	36	22
G.F. U.P School, Kottapuram	224	43	19
G.M.U.P, Chetuwa	499	136	27
St. Mary's L.P School	72	35	49
Sree Narayana U.P School	233	81	35
St. Thomas L.P School	544	117	21
St.Thomas High School	1323	303	23
National High School	678	180	27
Thirumangalam U.P School	229	86	38
All schools	4259	1107	26

Note: The number of students enrolled includes children from nearby villages.
SC = Scheduled castes.
Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996: 28.

The tradition of education and the number of schools in Engandiyour are reflected in the literacy levels. As is evident in Table 5.5, in 1961 nearly half of the population in Engandiyour was literate. The corresponding figure in 1991 was about 78 per cent. Literacy of women in Engandiyour, although slightly lower than men, has been slightly higher than for Kerala and much higher than the all-India level (Table 2.11). According to the 1996 village report, Engandiyour is effectively fully literate, as 90 per cent of the population in ages above seven years were literate (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:25).

Table 5.5: Total literacy rate (all ages) in Engandiyour, 1961-1991.

Year	Males	Females	Total
1961	57.42	44.29	50.42
1971	66.29	58.09	61.90
1981	77.01	71.41	73.97
1991	80.62 (93.15)	76.50 (87.24)	78.4 (89.69)

Notes: Figures in brackets indicate based on 7+ population.
Sources: Director of Census Operations (1974:137), District Census Handbook, Town and village Directory, Series 9, Kerala, Trichur District, Primary Census Abstract.
District Census Handbook, 1966, 4, Trichur, Kerala State, pp. 62-63;
Director of Census Operations (1991:90), Series 12, Paper 3 of 1991, Final Population Totals.

The long tradition of the importance of knowledge and literacy levels is evident from the number of libraries functioning in the village. As early as 1916 the village had its first library. Since then numbers have increased and in 1996 there were seven libraries functioning in the village. These village libraries are not simply collections of books but places where young people meet and discuss various issues that range from the local to the international. They also serve as venues for social activities such as adult education, voluntary help in crises, blood donations and other such activities. Interviews with some of librarians revealed that scheduled castes were making use of these libraries to a much greater extent than a few decades ago.

Table 5.6: Libraries functioning in Engandiyour, 1995

Name of library	Year established	Number of members	No. of books
C. Krishnavilasam Library	1916	130	10,450
Kerala *vayanasala*	1956	148	6386
Desabimani *vayanasala*	1982	120	1098
Brothers' library and reading room	1986	411	1443
Ramu Karyat *grandhasala*	1990	241	1279
Jay Bharat Library and Reading Room	1991	125	1000
Velukutty Master Memorial Library	1991	80	1200
Total	–	1255	22,856

Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:55.

5.2.7 The economy

5.2.7.1 The economy in the traditional-caste-system period

Informal interviews with senior villagers and literature dealing with the economy of the Malabar[8] region suggest that the economy was near subsistence level at the beginning of the twentieth century. Major sources of livelihood for the village during the period 1920-30 were agriculture and fishing. Rice and coconuts were the main agricultural products at that time. Since data on agricultural crops of the village are not available, agricultural information for Ponnani[9] *taluk*, of which Engandiyour was a part, is used here. According to the information, paddy was the most important crop in the *taluk* during the period 1925-26, as about 62 per cent of the area cultivated was used for rice. As Table 5.7 shows, a variety of crops were cultivated during 1925-26, but rice predominated.

Table 5.7: Distribution of crops in Ponnani *taluk*, Malabar, 1925-26.

Type of crops	Area (acres)	Per cent of total area[b]
Rice	132,917	62.6
Ragi	2300	1.1
Other cereals	6214	2.9
Oil seeds	724	0.3
Other oil seeds[a]	83,648	39.4
Condiments and spices	4315	2.0
Sugarcane	467	0.2
Cotton etc.	40	–
Other	17,429	8.2
Garden produce	7820	3.7
Total area	21,2089	

Notes: [a]Since there is no mention about coconuts, it appears that this category may indicate coconut fields. [b]Total exceeds one hundred because some crops are cultivated twice a year.
Sources: *Malabar District Gazetteers*, 1933.

Some industries such as coir, timber, tile, weaving, fish-oil, steel umbrellas, metal works, coconut-shell carving, *beedi* (Indian cigarettes), safety matches, oil, and

[8]The village was administratively part of the Malabar district of Madras Presidency.
[9] Now Engandiyour is a part of Chavakkad *taluk*.

soap industries were established in some parts of the Malabar District before 1930 (Madras District Gazetteers, 1933:xxiii). Coir and fishing were the two small-scale industries functioning in the village before 1930. Although cashew trees were abundant in the village, their value in those days was very low, compared to coconuts or rice, and hence did not give any impetus for economic progress. Evidence suggests that the floods of 1924 and the cyclone of 1925 hit both the Malabar region and the village (Madras District Gazetteers, 1933:xxxi, xxxiii). Such calamities must have resulted in serious economic hardship for the villagers.

Interviews with senior members of the village revealed that the occupational structure in the village during the decade 1920-30 was primarily based on the caste system. Accordingly, the Namboodiris and Nairs were the landlords who controlled agricultural production in the village. Other communities, mostly Ezavas, rented land to cultivate based on *patam* from Nairs and Namboodiris. The Vettuvans were labourers who lived as tenants on the land of the Nairs, Namboodiris or temples (called *devasam* land) which was leased out to Ezavas on *patam*. Thus, the land in the village was cultivated by the Ezavas with the labour of the Vettuvans. The Ezavas were responsible for the *patam* that had to be given to the landlords or temples.

In Engandiyour, the Mukkuvan and the Valan were fishing communities on the sea coast and backwaters of the village. Some Muslims from the coastal areas were also engaged in fishing. Christians were mostly small businessmen or were working in a salaried jobs. Castes and their traditional and present occupations are given in Appendix 5.

Senior villagers revealed that the poor distribution of agricultural products led the lower castes to have little to eat during the time of the traditional caste system, particularly when there were natural calamities such as floods. Those who managed and worked agriculture for the landlords had little of their own as most of the produce had to be given as rent. The poverty and injustice that prevailed in the village may have led to frustration on the part of the Ezavas. Such frustrations are evident from the migratory trend observed in the village from the Ezava community during the 1930s. It is reported that men from the Ezava community migrated to Ceylon (Sri Lanka)[10] for employment in the 1930s. Most of these

[10]Although migration to Burma and Malaya during the 1930s from Kerala is documented in the literature (Isaac, 1997:270), my investigation indicated that no one from the village migrated to those countries. It is important to note that migration in the 1930s and 1940s was limited to only a few families in the village.

migrants were engaged in small business in Ceylon. Because of unfavourable circumstances in Ceylon, most returned to the village during the 1950s and established successful businesses in Kerala using their savings. These families were some of the very rich in the village even in 1997. However, only very few families from the village migrated to Ceylon.

Migration to other states in India also began during that period. Nasik (in Maharashtra state), Mumbai (Bombay) and Chennai (Madras) were the major destinations of villagers. Again the push factors were the poor economic and social conditions that prevailed in the village. In short, in the early decades of the twentieth century Engandiyour was a economically backward village where agricultural production was controlled by a small section of the upper-caste Hindus. During the 1940s and 1950s, the traditional caste system-based economic organisation in the village began to weaken because of various reform efforts.

During the 1950s and 1960s the village started evolving an economic and social order based more on individual competence and less on the caste system. For example, in the 1960s Ezavans started to give up their traditional occupation, toddy tapping[11], and became agriculturists, businessmen, and salaried workers, or migrated abroad or to other parts of India for employment. Similarly, Nairs began to take up government positions during this period as their traditional status and wealth began to decline because of reforms within their communities. The other communities in the village, including the Muslims, did not change their occupations significantly during the 1950s and 1960s, however, as education in these communities remained at relatively low levels. Christians in the village remained mainly as petty businessmen or had salaried jobs in hospitals and schools.

5.2.7.2. The Gulf migration, land reform and village economy

Although migration had taken place to some degree before, nothing in prior experience compares with the effect of the exodus to the Gulf countries that began in the 1970s[12]. Many men from the village went to the Gulf countries using sea-going local vessels (launches) during the mid-1970s (Saseendran, 1986). The experience of the Mukkuvan in sailing and the availability of a suitable port

[11]Extracting toddy, a white alcoholic drink, from coconut trees.

[12]Statistics are not readily available about the number of people working in Gulf countries. Based on my interviews with various people in the village it is reasonable to believe that on average one person per family worked in the Gulf.

(Chetuwa) in the village facilitated this voyage. The experiences of families in the village vary from great success to the tragic deaths of some travellers during their voyage. Those who were successful in reaching the Gulf countries became some of the richest families in the village. Families who lost their grown-up children on these voyages have not forgotten their bad luck[13].

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the number of villagers who migrated to the Gulf countries reached a peak. The first to go to the Gulf were fishermen belonging to the Mukkuvan, Valan and Muslim communities. Mukkuvan were expert sailors and fishermen and were associated with the traders from across the sea (Iyer, 1970). But once the migration was formalised, members from all communities except Nairs and scheduled caste Hindus participated. During the 1970s and 1980s migration from the village to other states in India also increased.

A notable effect of Gulf migration on the village was to change the economic structure of the village. Interviews with Vettuvan, Nair and Ezavas revealed that the upper-caste Hindus, the Nairs, did not choose to go to the Gulf, as they had enough landed property on which to depend. Furthermore, being upper-caste Hindus, the Nairs did not like to mix with migrants who were mostly Muslims or Ezavas. Thus, the Nairs remained at a distance from opportunities of economic development. Consequently, the Ezavas and Muslims in the village became richer. The economic position of the Nairs started to deteriorate as agriculture became less profitable because of higher wages, and the prices of rice and wheat dropped as a result of imports from other states. As remittances from the Gulf started pouring into the village, the cost of living increased greatly. To have the resources needed for a living standard up to their traditional status, the Nairs had to sell most of their land. Ironically, it was the Muslims or the Ezavas who purchased the land. The Nairs had education that enabled them to take up government jobs in Kerala. Compared to wages in the Gulf, however, the salaries of the government employees in Kerala were substantially lower. Thus, the Nairs, once the landlords in the village, became one of the less prosperous groups.

Yet another important event that took place in the village during the 1970s was the implementation of land reform. In Engandiyour land reforms started in the early 1970s and ended by the mid-1970s. All tenants in the village were given 5-15 cents of land depending on the location. If the tenant hut was in a coconut plantation,

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[13] Any discussion about Gulf migration in the village often reminds people of both the success and the tragedies. While many families were able to benefit from the initial migration, a few families lost their sons, money or both.

then the possible land size to which the tenant was entitled was around 5 cents. On the other hand, if the land was barren, the tenant might get between 10 and 15 cents.

Paddy and coconut were the major agricultural crops in the village until about 1970. The cropping pattern of Engandiyour in 1995 is displayed in Table 5.8, which shows that in 1995 rice was cultivated only on about two hectares of land and coconut was cultivated on about 1015 hectares of land (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996). It is reported that about 75 per cent of the village was rice fields before 1970, while the proportion was less than one per cent in 1995 (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:11). There are several reasons for this shift. First, rice cultivation is more labour-intensive than a cash crop such as coconut. When wages increased, labour-intensive rice cultivation became uneconomic. Secondly, with a construction boom in the village, most agricultural labourers turned to construction as wages were higher than in agriculture. These and other changes in the village resulted in a severe labour shortage; hence, labour-intensive paddy cultivation had to be discontinued. When coconut growing became cheaper and more profitable, more and more rice fields became coconut plantations. Thirdly, many farmers found coconut more profitable as the price of rice fell relative to coconut prices. Fourthly, as land prices increased in the village, many farmers converted their rice fields into housing plots and sold them for exceptionally high prices to Gulf-migrant families. A visitor to the village after 15-20 years would find it transformed.

Table 5.8: Agriculture cultivation in Engandiyour, 1995

Agricultural crop	Area cultivated in hectares
Paddy	2
Vegetables	20
Coconut	1055
Banana	2
Tapioca	2
Black pepper	5
Cashew nut	4
Mango	2
Jackfruit	1

Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996: 17.

Animal husbandry is another sector that has experienced a drastic decline. The village used to have a large number of cows, buffaloes, and goats as an important source of dairy products and manure (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:18). With rice cultivation almost disappearing from the village, it was difficult for people to find grass and hay to feed animals. Importing hay from other places and buying other commercial food have raised the cost of raising livestock. Considering the increase in the cost of feeding and caring for cows and buffaloes, villagers consider it cheaper to buy milk.

The major source of livelihood for the village in the 1990s has been the remittances from the migrants working either in the Gulf countries or in other Indian states: the village economy may be considered a 'remittance-based economy'. As can be seen in Table 5.9 the amount of foreign exchange received by various banks in the village during the financial year 1994-95 was 945 lakh[14] Indian rupees[15] (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:63). If remittances apart from those through banks[16] are included, the amount coming to migrant families is still higher. Although comparatively small, the remittances from other Indian states are important to many families. Thus, the village economy is vulnerable because if remittances stop for any reason the villagers will find it difficult to manage their livelihood[17].

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[14] 1 lakh = 100 thousand.

[15] Approximately 3,780,000 Australian dollars.

[16] Illegal channels of remittance from the Gulf were noticed by Isaac (1997:284) in a village near Varkala the southern coastal migration belt of Kerala in June 1993.

[17] It should be noted here that savings are mostly used for construction of houses, or buying durables or to finance marriages.

Table 5.9: Foreign remittances to various banks in Engandiyour, 1994-95

Name of the Bank	Amount in Indian rupees (in lakhs)
Indian Overseas Bank	395.00
The Federal Bank	350.00
The South Indian Bank	125.00
Catholic Syrian Bank	50.00
Engandiyour Farmers's Co-operative Bank	25.00
Total	945.00

Notes: One Australian dollar is about 25 Indian rupees.
1 lakh = one hundred thousand.
Source: Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:63.

Interviews and participant observation in Engandiyour revealed the living standards. Not only are these high, but they have also improved substantially since the Gulf migration began. Traditionally, the villagers used to eat *kanji,* rice gruel, for breakfast and dinner, with rice and fish curry or with yellow lentils. In the 1990s, *kanji* has been replaced by eggs and milk, along with any rice preparation. Lunch and dinner with fish curry and vegetables is common. Chicken, lamb, and beef are eaten at least once a week by most of the villagers. In 1997, Hindus of the village not only ate beef but also advocated its use to those who did not eat it. Probably very few abstained from meat for reasons that are religious or caste based. In 1997 there was absolutely no starvation or evident hunger in the village in marked contrast to the situation 50 years ago.

5.3 The Vettuvans

5.3.1 Who are the Vettuvans?

Clearly the social and economic circumstances of Engandiyour have been transformed in the last quarter-century. How does the Vettuvan community fit into this new setting? And indeed, who precisely are the Vettuvans? The name Vettuvan (Betwas or Wettowar) appears to be derived from the word *Vedan* meaning hunter (Luiz, 1962). There was a caste with the same name in Salem, Coimbatore, and Madurai in the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu; members of this caste were soldiers under the Kongu Kings. The Vettuvans of Malabar and

Cochin, however, had very low status. They were a lower caste of agricultural serfs or collectors of forest produce in the jungles. According to Iyer (1909:119), an authority on South Indian castes and tribes, it is not possible to know whether the Vettuvans of Malabar and Cochin are descendants of the Vettuvans from Tamil Nadu.

The Vettuvans are said to have a legend showing that they were not originally so low in the social hierarchy. It is related that one of their tribe went and asked a high-caste Nair to give him a daughter in marriage. The Nair offered to do so on condition that the whole tribe would come to his place and dance on berries; each one who fell was to be shot with arrows. The tribe foolishly agreed to the condition, and went and danced, with the result that, as each one tripped and fell, he or she was mercilessly shot dead with arrows. A little girl who survived this treatment was secretly rescued and taken away by a compassionate Nair, who married her into his family. From this union, the present day Vettuvans trace their origin. (*Madras Mail,* 1907 quoted in Thurston, 1909:396).

In Kerala Vettuvans are found in the Malabar and Cochin regions. In 1815 their population in the Malabar region was 3,347 (Kumar, 1965:50). According to the 1901 census of Madras Presidency there were 6,349 Vettuvans, 3099 males and 3250 females, in Malabar (Iyer, 1901:119). According to the 1971 Census there were 20,065 Vettuvans in Kerala (Director of Census Operations, 1971). Kumar (1965:50) reports that Vettuvans were slaves in some districts in Malabar. According to Panikkar (1900:339), in Malabar, Vettuvans lived on the coconut plantations of the Nairs and other well-to-do classes. Their main occupations were preparing coconut plantations, coconut plucking, tilling, and other allied work. Iyer (1905 quoted in Thurston, 1904:400) gives the following account for the Vettuvans of Cochin region:

> They [Vettuvans] are pure agricultural labourers, taking part in every kind of work connected with agriculture, such as ploughing, sowing, weeding, transplanting, pumping water, and reaping. They are more day labourers. The males get two edangazhis of paddy (hardly worth of 2 annas), and the females an edangazhi and a half. In times of scarcity, they find it difficult to support themselves (Iyer, 1905 quoted in Thurston, 1909:400-403).

To sum up, clearly, Vettuvans constituted one of the most disadvantaged groups in Kerala.

5.3.2 The Vettuvans of Engandiyour

There is no precise information about the history of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour, except the general view of villagers that their ancestors migrated to the coastal regions of Kerala from neighbouring Tamil Nadu. With regard to traditions the Vettuvans of the village resembled the Cochin Vettuvans, documented by Iyer (1905 quoted in Thurston, 1909).

As mentioned earlier, in 1991 about 23.6 per cent of the population in the village belonged to scheduled castes. Since the majority of the scheduled cases in the village were in the Vettuvan community, it is estimated that in 1991 about 3,500-4,000 Vettuvans lived in Engandiyour. Vettuvans were distributed fairly evenly throughout the village. During the traditional caste system one or more Vettuvan households were attached to each landlord, depending on the size of their landed property. It is probably due to such arrangements that the Vettuvan settlements were spread over the village without any specific concentration. However, some predominantly Vettuvan colonies have emerged recently in the village. These colonies were generated as a result of the 'one lakh housing scheme' of the government of Kerala in the 1970s to provide housing for the poor[18].

5.3.3 Living standards of the Vettuvans

Housing conditions and household amenities revealed in the Vettuvan Household Survey in Engandiyour are set out in Tables 5.10 and 5.11. In 1997, the housing conditions of the Vettuvans in the village were relatively poor compared to the overall village situation. For example, nearly three-fifths of the Vettuvan houses had roofs of coconut-leaf thatch, compared to less than one-third of such houses in the total village. Household amenities recorded in the 1997 Vettuvan Household Survey indicate tremendous scope for improving basic amenities. For example, over a quarter of houses still did not have a latrine. Similarly, 70 per cent of houses had no electricity. However, drinking water was available to most of the families within a walking distance of 5-10 minutes. The government had provided water pipelines where other sources of drinking water were not available.

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[18] 57,000 houses were built under this scheme in Kerala during 1970-1977 (Jeffrey, 1992:206). Panchayath recognised 10 colonies in the village to provide developmental assistance.

Table 5.10: Type of roof of Vettuvan houses, Engandiyour, 1997

Type of roof	Per cent of houses	
	Vettuvan	Village
Thatched	61	31
Tiled	33	27
Concrete	6	42

Sources: Household Survey, 1997; PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995; and Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996.

Table 5.11: Housing conditions of the Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Item	Per cent of total houses
Floor	
Mud	28
Cement	62
Mud and cement	10
Walls	
Mud	4
Leaf	44
Brick	40
Leaf and mud	10
Mud and stone	2
Electricity connection	
Yes	30
No	70
Modern latrine	
Yes	70
No	30
Number of rooms	
1-2	38
3-4	52
5+	10
Cooking fuel[a]	
Wood (primary)	100
Kerosene (secondary)	9
Source of drinking water	
Own well	15
Neighbours' well	16
Pond	1
Pipeline of water supply	60
Government well	8

Note: [a]Adds to more than 100 because of multiple use.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

To obtain a detailed picture of the living standards of the Vettuvans, the availability of some household possessions in the family was taken in to account. From Table 5.12 and my observations in the village during the field work, overall, household possessions of the Vettuvans are not indicative of comparable living standards to the rest of the villagers. However, considering their living conditions in the caste system, these possessions indicate their progress, although much would need to be changed to make their standard of living equal to the rest of the village.

Table 5.12: Percentage of Vettuvan households possessing various goods, Engandiyour, 1997.

Goods	Per cent households possessing
Chair	44
Table	32
Cupboard	22
Cot	21
Radio	56
Watch	60
Gold	62
Grinder	4
Tape-recorder	23
Clock	50
Fan	14

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

The standard of living in terms of food consumption indicates that on average Rs. 631 a week was spent on cooked or raw food items. A family of 1-5 members spent Rs. 539 per week. The corresponding figures for families with 6-10 members, and 11 and over were Rs. 783 and Rs. 1126, respectively. Interviews with Vettuvan men and women in Engandiyour revealed that the Vettuvans' standard of living in terms of food consumption was comparable with that of the non-Vettuvans[19].

[19]Disparities in mean per capita consumption of scheduled castes and non-scheduled castes in Assam, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal were revealed in a study by Saggar and Pan (1994).

That they have expenses higher than their income is evident from the debts of the Vettuvans. About two-thirds of the Vettuvans at the time of my study were in debt. The average debt of the family was Rs. 10,000; the range was Rs. 1000 to 40,000. The major reasons for borrowing money were house construction, marriage of a daughter, and medical treatment of a family member.

Landholding of each surveyed Vettuvan household in 1997 is given in Table 5.13. The table reveals that nearly a quarter of the households had four cents or less; about 30 per cent between 5 and 9 cents; another 30 per cent between 10 and 14; and about 13 per cent over 15 cents. Only four per cent of households did not reveal their landholding size. The landholding account also suggests that, overall, there had been no increase in the land holding of the Vettuvans from what they received through land reform in the 1970s. My interviews revealed that in most of the cases 10 cents of land was given to each household at that time.

Table 5.13: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan households according to landholding, Engandiyour, 1997

Land size in cents[a]	Number and per cent of households
Less than 4	81 (23.8)
5-9	102 (30.0)
10-14	101 (29.7)
15-19	15 (4.4)
20 and above	29 (8.6)
Do not know/no answer	12 (3.5)
Total	340 (100.0)

Note: [a]1 cent = .0004 hectares.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

Only about 6 per cent of the families surveyed subscribed to newspapers and about 9 per cent to popular magazines. Vettuvans read newspapers or listen to those who read while having their morning tea at the local tea shop. These shops are a place for discussion on everyday political and other issues[20]. However, women do not have this opportunity as they do not go to tea shops for their morning tea. Their source of information, on the other hand, is popular magazines, which are

[20]According to Mayer (quoted in Jeffrey, 1992:210) these function 'as centres for intercaste mixing, and have played a part in the weakening of caste restrictions'.

borrowed from the neighbours who subscribe to them.

5.3.4 Educational status of the Vettuvans

The educational achievements of the Vettuvans in the surveyed households are shown in Table 5.14. The age cohort 60 years or above had low levels of education, with nearly three-fourths of this age group never having been to school. The average number of years of schooling for this cohort, born in the year 1937 or earlier, was one year. This suggests that by 1944 or earlier (since seven years was the approximate age at first entry to school in those days), the Vettuvans had some access to school attendance. However, until recently the educational history of the village shows that the educational facilities available were less effective in educating the Vettuvans on a large scale. Although statistics are not available, the field work for this study provided evidence to confirm that other communities, particularly the upper castes in the village, had much higher levels of education than the Vettuvans in the early twentieth century. Evidence suggests that the strong caste system prevented the Vettuvans from gaining an education[21]. It may be recalled here that the Vettuvans were untouchables to the upper castes in the village and were not allowed even to use public places in the village until about the 1930s. Education was something that the majority of Vettuvans could not even think of. One elderly Vettuvan reported that the subordination of the Vettuvans restricted the thinking of the lower caste people, such as the Vettuvans, as they believed education was for upper castes and that it was 'inappropriate' for them to have education. It is, however, important to note that some Vettuvans could send their children to school as early as the 1940s. This owes much to the fact that a school in the village was opened as early as 1895 by an Ezavan. It is possible that some Vettuvans who had some kind of association with the Ezavas who managed the school could have sent their children to this school. However, further investigation would be needed to confirm this.

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[21] See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on restrictions on education for the lower castes.

Improvements in education, both in quality and quantity, can be seen from the younger age cohorts. For instance, the age cohort 20-29[22] has shown significant improvement in the levels of education compared to higher age cohorts. A consistent increase in the average number of years of schooling was noticed among younger age cohorts, confirming an increasing trend in education. While it is hard to pinpoint exactly when Vettuvans began to educate their children, a trend in their education suggests a tentative view on the timing of an educational transition, as well as its speed. Although education among the Vettuvans had begun by the 1940s, notable improvements took place after 1950. This is evident from the fact that in 1997 about half the age cohort 50-59 had some schooling. It may be further noted that about four-fifths of the Vettuvans in the age cohort 40-49 had some schooling, indicating a further boost in lower-caste education after the formation of Kerala state in 1956. The Kerala government recognised the need for education and put emphasis on opening more schools. By 1960, Engandiyour village had two high schools, two middle schools, two primary schools and four pre-schools[23]. A further improvement in education is reflected in the age cohort 30-39 where nearly 89 per cent of the Vettuvans had some schooling. Up to 1970, educational improvement for the Vettuvans was mainly concentrated at lower educational levels, mostly below high-school level. The age cohort 20-29, however, indicates a substantially shift to higher education, that is, beyond high school. About 17 per cent of the 20-29 age cohort had college education. This shift to higher education took place after the land reform and during Gulf migration from the village in the 1970s.

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[22]Age cohorts younger than 20-24 were not considered for comparison because most of them in the 5-9 and 10-19 age cohorts may not have completed their education. Any calculation of education level in these categories will be highly influenced by their age; for example, in the 10-19 age cohort there may not be many students in college simply because at 10-14 years children are too young to go to college. In this situation if we compare college level education at 10-19 with the 20-24 age cohorts, our results may be biased.

[23]See Section 5.2.3 for a discussion on education in Engandiyour.

Table 5.14: Educational levels of the Vettuvans (5 years and above), Engandiyour, 1997

Level of schooling	Current age (years)							All ages
	5-9	10-19[a]	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
No schooling	–	1.4	2.5	11.8	21.6	49.2	76.1	17.0
Primary, complete or incomplete	100	6.4	4.1	16.5	24.3	23.9	14.7	17.2
Upper primary complete	–	36.8	25.8	34.0	34.9	17.4	6.7	27.0
High school complete	–	48.5	50.6	34.6	18.8	9.4	2.4	32.5
Pre-degree and above	–	6.9	17.0	3.1	0.5	–	–	6.3
Total per cent	–	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average number of years of schooling	–	7.79	8.53	6.11	4.59	2.55	1.00	5.89
Number of cases	98	362	437	297	218	138	163	1717

Notes: [a]Since many children in this age group are not old enough to attend high school and college, the percentages given against each level need to be used only as an indicator of education. However, the category 'no schooling' can be taken for comparison without any problem.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

From the above analysis the following conclusions can be made. First, an educational transition has taken place in the Vettuvan community, from a high level of illiteracy in the older age cohorts to a low level in the younger cohorts. Secondly, despite all the hurdles of the caste system in the village, some Vettuvans were able to start schooling as early as the 1940s. Thirdly, the land reform of the 1970s and Gulf migration in the late 1970s were paralleled by a shift to higher levels of education.

5.3.5 Female and male education

Table 5.15 shows that female educational levels have improved significantly over the last four decades. In 1997, in the age cohorts 60 years or above about 84 per cent had never been to school compared to about 3 per cent in the age cohort 20-29 years. No illiterates were found in age cohorts younger than 15 years. The average number of years of schooling also shows a similar trend. As indicated in the earlier section, results for younger age cohorts (below 20 years) are biased by age and, therefore, should be taken as an indicator of trend. The illiteracy level

noted above roughly indicates that female education was not very common in the 1940s, and to some extent in the 1950s and the 1960s. A notable change in female education took place in the 1970s. During this time nearly 97 per cent women were literate. Not only were they literate, but about 90 per cent of them were educated to higher than primary level. It was during this time that college education became more popular among the Vettuvans. Nearly 21 per cent of the 20-29 age cohort had college education. An educational transition, from virtually total illiteracy to total literacy, among females appears to have been completed by about the early 1980s.

Table 5.15: Distribution of Vettuvan females (5 years and above) by educational levels, Engandiyour, 1997

Years of schooling	Current age (years)								All ages
	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
No schooling	–	–	0.9	3.4	17.0	30.9	65.3	83.7	21.8
1-4	100	9.4	–	5.0	19.3	28.9	15.3	10.9	16.7
5-7	–	67.2	10.4	23.5	30.3	28.9	15.3	4.3	22.7
8-10	–	23.4	73.6	47.5	28.8	11.3	4.2	1.1	30.4
11+	–	–	15.1	20.5	4.4	–	–	–	8.3
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number of cases	50	64	106	238	135	97	72	92	854
Average no. of years of schooling	2.3	6.4	9.6	8.7	5.6	3.6	1.8	0.6	5.7

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

Educational levels of Vettuvan males are given in Table 5.16. In 1997, among the men, in the age cohort 60 years and over, about 66 per cent had no school education compared to less than 2 per cent in the age cohort 20-29 years. But the levels of education showed a marked increase in the age cohort 50-59 and below. In the age cohorts 30-39 and below the percentage of those with no schooling was less than 10. The percentage of men in the younger age cohorts with more years of schooling steadily increases. About 65 per cent in the age group 15-19 had high school education compared to only about 4 per cent in age cohort 60 years and over. The average number of years of schooling rose from 1.5 years in the age cohort 60 and over, to about 8.5 years in the age cohort 15-19 years. The average

length of schooling of Vettuvan men in 1997 was 6 years.

Table 5.16: Distribution of Vettuvan males (5 years and above) by educational levels, Engandiyour, 1997

Years of schooling	Current age								All ages
	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
No schooling		0.9	3.5	1.5	7.4	14.0	31.8	66.2	12.1
1-4	100	14.8	1.1	3.0	14.3	20.7	33.3	19.7	18.0
5-7	–	58.3	19.7	28.6	36.6	39.7	19.7	9.8	30.8
8-10	–	25.9	65.1	54.3	39.7	24.8	15.2	4.2	34.7
11+	–		10.5	12.6	1.9	0.8	–	–	4.4
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of cases	48	108	86	199	161	121	66	71	862
Average no. of years of schooling	2.3	6.3	8.5	8.4	6.5	5.4	3.4	1.5	6.0

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

A comparison of male and female educational levels suggests that the educational transition began earlier among the males. However, although the educational transition started later among females, the pace of transition was faster than for males. This is evident from the more-or-less similar educational levels of males and females in the age cohort 30-39 and below in 1997. The mean number of years of schooling for males in 1997 was 6.0, and for females 5.7. The slightly higher level of schooling for males is due to the lower number of males than females in the 'no school' category in the higher age cohorts.

5.3.6 Occupational status of the Vettuvans

The major occupations of the Vettuvans under the caste system were coconut-picking and other agriculture-related work. Under the tenancy arrangements the entire Vettuvan family was the workforce of their landlord. The work of a tenant family included agriculture, caring for domestic animals, performing household work, and any other work demanded by the landlord. With the abolition of tenancy

Vettuvans became free to decide for whom they would work and what work they would do. No penalty could be imposed on a Vettuvan for not working for any particular family, including his previous landlord. Thus, it was the abolition of tenancy as a corollary of the land reform, which provided the basis for the occupational mobility of the Vettuvans.

However, without ample job opportunities it would have been very difficult for the Vettuvans to avoid a backlash from their previous landlords. The construction boom generated by the Gulf migration in the village was able to absorb those Vettuvan families who left their previous landlord. During the 1980s Vettuvans worked mainly as helpers in the construction industry, as they had no other construction skill. By the late 1990s, an occupational transition, from traditional to modern occupations, seems to have taken place. Table 5.17 shows that the percentage of men in labouring had been declining. For example, in the age cohort 50-60 nearly two-thirds of men were labourers compared to slightly over one-third in the age cohort 20-29. Thus, more and more younger men were leaving labouring. An increasing trend towards skilled work, on the other hand, was observed in the younger ages. For example, the skilled workers in the age cohort 20-29 comprised nearly two-fifths, compared to only 3 per cent in the age cohort 50-59. This is another remarkable change. As indicated earlier, job opportunities as a result of the Gulf migration were considerable. The specific areas in which the Gulf migration provided jobs included construction and transport-related industry. Construction-related industry included electricians, carpenters, masons, welders, plumbers, and contractors. The transport sector jobs include drivers and auto-mechanics. In 1997 the majority of jobs in the construction and transport industry in the village were occupied by Vettuvans. It may be recalled here that 40 taxis and 70 auto-three-wheelers were available to hire for public use, apart from the public bus services and private cars. It is common in the automobile workshops to see young school dropouts working as trainees. Considering the high wages in the unskilled labour market in the village, automobile training at private workshops may appear irrational to an outsider. To become a fully trained auto-mechanic would take not less than five years of training. These trainees did not receive wages or benefits in the first two or three years, except morning tea, and some money during important festivals such as *onam* or Christmas. The following is a summary of an interview with the mother of a Vettuvan mechanic who worked in a town in Tamil Nadu (Kerala's neighbouring state). This summary demonstrates the importance given to a non-labouring occupation, even if it is poorly paid. The 26 year-old auto-mechanic was a high school dropout from a local school. Since then

he had been an apprentice in several workshops in the village, in a nearby town, and in another state. During the previous 9-10 years of apprenticeship, his two brothers and mother paid for his food, lodging, transport, and clothes. According to his mother, who was a widow, this was possible because his two brothers were labourers. With the assistance from these two brothers their mother could meet the marriage and dowry expenses of their sisters, and buy gifts for their children. Yet the mother was proud of the son who was an auto-mechanic.

What then motivated young Vettuvans such as this to go for lower-paid skilled work compared with highly paid unskilled work? Only the attitudes of the Vettuvans could explain this behaviour; economics has a lesser role. Interviews and observation in Engandiyour revealed that an unskilled labourer has lower status than a helper in the automobile workshop; the driver of an auto-three-wheeler driver had a higher status than an unskilled labourer, even though an unskilled labourer receives higher wages than an auto-three-wheeler driver or a trainee in an automobile workshop. The marriage market was yet another place where skilled and semi-skilled workers were more in demand. They even demanded higher dowry. To some extent this was due to the fact that most of the unskilled workers were much less educated than the skilled workers. Although government and public sector jobs were reserved for the scheduled castes, the study revealed that this has not yielded any worthwhile effect on the number of Vettuvans from Engandiyour working in those sectors: only 3.3 per cent of males and 3.7 per cent of females aged 20-59 were in government or public sector jobs. The reason was simple: the number of applicants greatly outnumbered the availability of jobs. It may be important to mention at this stage that there were several hundred migrants from the neighbouring state, Tamil Nadu, working in the village, mostly as masons and construction assistants. It was reported that higher wages in Kerala than Tamil Nadu attracted these migrant workers. It was a widely held opinion in the village that these migrant workers were not 'as good' as the local masons or workers, and that people still preferred to have their construction done by the local workers if possible. Villagers also complained that migrant workers brought children of around 12-15 years of age to work for low wages. Villagers insisted that they did not want their work done by children. Thus, the migrant workers did not make a serious impact on the local labour market in displacing the local workers or in reducing wages significantly.

Table 5.17: Occupational structure of Vettuvan males, Engandiyour, 1997

Category	Age group (years)						
	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	All Ages
Labouring	5.6	37.7	56.9	62.4	66.2	42.8	40.2
Small business	0.5	9.5	12.5	12.8	13.8	5.7	8.5
Skilled work	13.5	38.2	22.5	10.3	3.1	1.4	19.0
Professionals	0.5	2.5	1.9	6.8	3.1	–	2.4
Not doing any job	17.1	11.0	6.2	7.6	13.8	50.0	14.7
Student	62.7	1.0	–	–	–	–	15.3
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total	193	199	160	117	65	70	804

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

Women, too, were part of the labour force of the landlord under the caste system. When tenancy was abolished, women also became free to work wherever they wished. The occupations of surveyed women are given in Table 5.18. Overall, women had withdrawn from labouring; they were predominantly engaged in household duties. Among women, in the age cohort 50 years and over, labouring is less common than in the age groups 30-50 years. This highlights the following changes in the Vettuvan community: older women withdraw from labouring as their children see it as inappropriate for their mothers to continue to work as labourers; men feel more status if their women folk are not working as labourers; and as living standards improved among the Vettuvans, women were needed at home to meet the demands of the household. A higher percentage of labouring women in the age group 40-49 partly indicates the life-cycle phase where children could be still in school and the husbands' parents may have retired from work, thus needing economic support from the women. This group of women may, at the same time, have support from their husbands' parents with household work and thus be free to work. The age cohort 20-29 showed a remarkably low proportion working as labourers. While this had some relation to the family life cycle, an increasing trend in structural changes in occupation for this group is evident. For example, more than one-tenth of women in this age group entered skilled or professional services, for instance as teachers, nurses, shop-assistants, and clerks.

As in the case of males, labouring paid a substantially higher wage than non-labouring occupations. For example, in 1997, a wage-earning female labourer received Rs. 80-100 a day, while the monthly salary of a shop assistant was between Rs. 250 and Rs. 350. If transport and other costs were taken into account, there was hardly any money left over. Again the question is why Vettuvans take low-earning higher-status jobs compared to high-earning low-status jobs. Again, the reason is attitudinal. Low-profile jobs keep status lower, while high-profile jobs keep status higher. A desk job was considered of higher status than work that required standing or physical activities. Similarly, a job that required pen and paper was considered a higher status job than a job that did not. In my study, no women who had a high-school education were found working as labourers. In the age cohort 10-19, less than 2 per cent of women were engaged in labouring. The majority of the women in this age cohort were students, or limited to household work. Among the Vettuvans, expansion of education was pushing them to white-collar jobs or confining them to the home. One of the important reasons for women not engaging in labouring was, as in the case of men, its association with lower status. It did not raise a father's status to have his daughter working as a labourer, or for a husband to have a wife engaged in labouring.

Table 5.18: Occupational structure of Vettuvan women, Engandiyour, 1997

Category	Age group (years)						
	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	All ages
Labouring	1.8	10.9	28.9	39.6	18.3	7.8	14.7
Small business	–	–	–	1.0	1.4	–	0.2
Skilled work	3.0	6.3	4.4	1.0	1.4	–	3.6
Professionals	1.2	4.6	3.7	2.1	2.8	–	2.8
Housework	41.3	76.9	63.0	56.3	76.1	82.1	66.3
Not doing any work	–	–	–	–	–	10.1	10.1
Student	52.7	1.3	–	–	–	–	11.4
Total per cent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Total number of cases	167	238	135	96	71	90	797

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

5.3.7 The implementation of land reform and changes in Vettuvans' status

In order to understand the transformation of the Vettuvans' social and economic world we must go back more than 25 years, to the land reform of the early 1970s. A notable change in the status of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour took place in the 1970s when the land reform provided the Vettuvans with small parcels of land on which their huts were located. In Engandiyour, the land reform was implemented over a period of eight years. However, most of the land reform was performed within four years from January 1970, the official commencement date of the Land Reform Act (see Table 5.19). According to interviews with Panchayath officials, Vettuvans, and previous landlords, each Vettuvan household in Engandiyour received five to 20 cents of land under the land reform[24]. According to the village officials, every single Vettuvan tenant family received land from the land reform. The land reform in Engandiyour was thus complete as far as the tenant Vettuvans were concerned.

Table 5.19: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan households that received land through land reform according to the year of receipt of land, Engandiyour

Year of receipt of land	% of Vettuvan families
1970-1974	83
1975-1978	14
No answer/do not know/others	3
Total	100

Note: N = 340
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

This reform probably made more difference to the Vettuvans' aspirations than to their immediate economic welfare. It was remarkable for Vettuvans to gain ownership of the huts and the land that they were unable to own for generations. The elderly Vettuvans were overwhelmed when discussing the transfer of land with us.

[24]In the Vettuvan Household Survey a question was asked on the land each family received through land reform. Some households were formed by partition since the implementation of land reform, and these households did not report that the land they had was received through land reform because they inherited the land from their parents. Therefore, no detailed statistics on the amount of land received by each Vettuvan household through land reform could be obtained from the Vettuvan Household Survey.

The land reform had a significant impact on the landlord-tenant relationship in Engandiyour. With land reform, the former landlords lost their traditional grip on their previous tenants, mostly the Vettuvans. Former landlords could no longer demand subordinate behaviour from the Vettuvans. Under tenancy arrangements and the caste system, the Vettuvans used to address their landlords as *achan*, 'father', and their wives as *amma*, 'mother'. They even had to address their landlords' children with great respect, *mon*, son and *mol,* daughter. Interviews revealed that this usage had been disappearing from the village since the late 1970s, and had completely disappeared by 1997. In 1997, the Vettuvans addressed an elderly man from an upper caste as *chetan,* 'elder brother', and a senior member of the upper caste as *achachan*, 'grandfather'. The Vettuvans used these expressions to address their own caste-fellows as well. These behavioural changes of the Vettuvans signal their desire to narrow social distance from other communities in the village, as well as to prove social mobility. By 1997, upper-caste villagers had no option but to accept the behaviour of the Vettuvans for the following reasons. Land reform provided the Vettuvans with a sense of security as well as self-respect. Security meant that they had their own land, and nobody could evict them or demand subordinate behaviour. Self-respect meant that they were no longer somebody's tenant and were thus free from the obligations of tenancy. In summary, since the 1970s they had been free from the bondage of tenancy and the traditional caste system. How the changes brought about by the land reform could sustain and further improve the social and economic situation of the Vettuvans is discussed in the following section.

5.3.8 Gulf migration from the village and changes in Vettuvans' status

At first sight, the direct effect of Gulf migration on the Vettuvans may seem limited, as few have themselves gone to the Gulf. In spite of this, the migration has been critically important. The migration from the village to the Gulf countries that began in the mid-1970s has been yet another factor that has helped the Vettuvans to improve their social position in Engandiyour by removing caste-system subordination. Until about 1990, the Vettuvans did not participate in the Gulf migration. Their poor economic and social status played an important role in their non-participation. Interviews with elderly villagers, returned Gulf migrants and earlier studies revealed that in the 1970s illegal boat operators charged Rs. 500 per person as a transport charge to the Gulf (Saseendran, 1986). This was far beyond the financial ability of an average Vettuvan in those days. In the 1980s, migration to the Gulf became legal and it required a visa. Interviews with families of recent

migrants to the Gulf revealed that in 1996-97, recruitment agents charged around Rs. 50,000 for a visa, again a huge amount for the Vettuvans. Apart from economic reasons, the low social status of the Vettuvans meant that upper-caste Hindus, Muslims, and Christians were reluctant to help them to obtain visas, because this would result in sharing the accommodation and other facilities[25].

Although the Vettuvans did not take part, the indirect influence of Gulf migration on their social and economic life has been enormous. Gulf migration worked in two ways to influence the social status of the Vettuvans. Firstly, it generated demand for labour in the village as construction of new houses and other allied activities in the village increased rapidly after the 1970s. During the 1990s, 200 new houses were estimated to have been constructed in the village each year (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996). Interviews with senior members of the village indicated that the house construction boom in the village had begun in the 1970s. Studies conducted elsewhere in Kerala showed that house construction boomed generally after the Gulf migration in the 1970s (Jeffrey, 1992:204-205; Mathew and Nair, 1978:1151). Since the labour supply in Engandiyour has been less than the demand since the 1970s owing to the construction boom, the Vettuvans were able to refuse to work for a particular person or family should they find their behaviour inappropriate to their expectations. This situation was reinforced by the changes brought by land reform, education, and other social changes that occurred in the village. Furthermore, the Vettuvans were the only village community that specialised in coconut-picking. If they refused to do this job, it was very hard to find people with the same skills in the village. The higher demand for labour in general, as well as for coconut-pickers in the village, probably put the Vettuvans more in demand. A group in high demand is more difficult to maltreat.

Secondly, Gulf migration paved the way for many Vettuvans to diversify their occupations from the traditional occupation of coconut-picking and other agriculture-related work to skilled and semi-skilled occupations such as taxi-driving, electricity, carpentry, masonry, welding, plumbing, and contracting. Young non-Vettuvan men were working in the Gulf countries, forcing their families to depend fully on the labouring class for any major work. This situation further shrank the already lean unskilled labour class, and led to a further increase in the demand for unskilled labour in the village. This again had a tremendous

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[25]It is the responsibility of the person helping an applicant to obtain a visa to arrange accommodation and food till the applicant gets a job and settles down.

effect on the behaviour of employers towards the labouring class. It was very common in the village to see people wanting to hire labour frequently visiting the houses of the Vettuvans, as Vettuvans often do not work on a previously agreed date. Again, employers had no way of forcing the Vettuvans, who comprise a majority of the labouring class, to work on committed dates. Any such attempt would result in a total boycott of any future work for a particular family, or the labourers would demand exorbitant wages as a punishment for this behaviour.

5.4 Interaction of Vettuvans with non-Vettuvans in Engandiyour: the social status of Vettuvans in 1997

The relative social status of Vettuvans has manifestly improved in recent decades. This section attempts to assess how far the old caste-derived inhibitions and restrictions have been eliminated. To assess the social status of the Vettuvans in 1997 in Engandiyour a question about visits to the nearest neighbour was asked of each family. The percentage of Vettuvan families that visited their nearest neighbours during the reference period is presented in Table 5.20. The reference period was the two months before the Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997. Table 5.20 shows that, overall, during the reference period, slightly more than a quarter of the Vettuvan families did not visit their nearest neighbour. Table 5.20 also shows the caste or religion of the nearest neighbour. A quarter of the Vettuvan families did not visit their Vettuvan neighbour during the reference period. Certainly, this could not be due to the caste factor as there is no special hierarchy among the Vettuvans[26]. Informal interviews and observations revealed that brothers or close relatives who lived in nearby houses (as a cluster) on a small plot of land, mostly inherited from their parents, often had disputes over property and hence had very little interaction. Only about 10 per cent of Vettuvan families did not visit their Ezavan neighbours. The major reasons reported by the Vettuvans for not visiting their Ezavan neighbours were disputes over property, the inferior economic position of the Vettuvans, their poor educational levels, and incidence of infectious diseases of the Vettuvans, such as tuberculosis and skin diseases. Vettuvans had low levels of interaction with the Hindu fishermen and their Muslim neighbours. The major reasons reported by Vettuvans for not visiting a Muslim or Hindu fisherman's family included the economic inferiority of the Vettuvans, lack of any need to visit, and disputes over property. Among those who had a Christian or Nair neighbour, about a quarter of the Vettuvans did not visit them. The main

[26]Though not significant, divisions according to education and occupation are gradually emerging.

reason for Vettuvans not visiting their Christian and Nair neighbours was the lack of a need to visit them. According to the Vettuvans, it was no longer caste status as such that was hindering their interaction with non-Vettuvans, but their poor economic and educational status.

Table 5.20: Percentage of Vettuvan families that interacted with their neighbours, Engandiyour, 1997

	Neighbour						
	Vettuvan	Ezava	Muslim	Fisherman	Christian	Nair	Total
Vettuvans who visited	75	89	74	61	65	65	71
Vettuvans who did not visit	25	11	26	39	35	35	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

The percentage of neighbours who visited the Vettuvan families is displayed in Table 5.21. Nearly one-third of the Vettuvans' neighbours did not interact with the Vettuvans. While Vettuvans had the highest interaction with Ezavas compared to other communities, the Ezavas did not show the same level of interaction with their Vettuvan neighbours. This asymmetry indicates that some Ezavas were not visiting their Vettuvan neighbours, even though the Vettuvans were visiting them. According to the Vettuvans, their own poor economic conditions were responsible for this.

Table 5.21: Percentage of Vettuvans' neighbours who interacted with Vettuvan families, Engandiyour, 1997

	Neighbour						
	Vettuvan	Ezava	Muslim	Fisherman	Christian	Nair	Total
Visited Vettuvan	76	67	73	61	60	61	69
Did not visit Vettuvan	24	33	27	39	40	39	31
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

To understand the purposes of visits of Vettuvans and their neighbours, each Vettuvan household was asked to provide the most important reason for visiting their nearest neighbour and for the neighbour visiting them during the reference period. The details that emerged from the analysis are summarised in Table 5.22. Overall, the visits of Vettuvans to their neighbours were limited to general conversations. In over half of the cases, a Vettuvan family visited a Vettuvan neighbour for general conversation. Borrowing money and goods was the reason in one-fifth of the cases. Interviews with elderly Vettuvans indicated that there had been strong economic co-operation among the Vettuvan families in the 1960s. Higher wages and availability of shops in every corner of the village probably contribute to the lack of economic co-operation between families today. Other reasons for the Vettuvans visiting a Vettuvan family were to watch television, to fetch water, and to attend a social function. Important reasons for a Vettuvan visiting an Ezavan family included general conversation, to borrow money or goods, to watch television, and to fetch water. The reasons for Vettuvans visiting their Muslim neighbours included general conversation, to watch television, and to attend social functions. The reasons for Vettuvans visiting their Christian neighbours included general conversation and to watch television. Vettuvan families' visits to Nair families were limited to fetching water.

When Vettuvans visited their non-Vettuvan neighbours, conversation took place outside the homes of non-Vettuvans. Normally, a college-educated Vettuvan or a white-collar job holder was given a chair to sit on at a non-Vettuvan's house.

However, when Vettuvans visited non-Vettuvans upon an invitation to a social function, they were received without regard to educational and economic status.

Table 5.22: Percentage distribution of reasons for Vettuvans visiting their nearest neighbour, Engandiyour, 1997

Type of visit	Reasons to visit						
	General conversation	Work-related	Attend functions only	Watch TV	Borrow money/ goods	Fetch water	Others
Vettuvan visiting a Vettuvan family	53	2	10	2	20	3	10
Vettuvan visiting an Ezavan family	37	10	4	14	16	13	6
Vettuvan visiting a Christian family	75	–	–	25	–	–	–
Vettuvan visiting a Nair family	–	–	–	–	–	100	–
Vettuvan visiting a Muslim family	48	5	10	29	–	8	–

Note: – indicates no cases in that category; all rows add to 100 per cent.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

The reasons for the nearest non-Vettuvan families visiting a Vettuvan family are displayed in Table 5.23. About 43 per cent of the Ezavan neighbours visited Vettuvans for general conversation, and slightly more than a quarter visited for work-related reasons. Another 13 per cent of Ezavan neighbours visited a Vettuvan family to borrow money or goods. About half of the Christian neighbours visited Vettuvan families for work-related reasons, and a quarter for general conversation. Muslim neighbours visited Vettuvan families mostly for conversation and to attend social functions. Nair neighbours visited their Vettuvan neighbours only for work-related reasons.

The Vettuvan Household Survey also revealed that the conversations between the Vettuvans and the non-Vettuvans took place outside the homes of the Vettuvans. Poor housing conditions and lack of furniture were reported as reasons for the conversation taking place outside their homes. If the Vettuvan family was educated and economically better off, non-Vettuvans sat and talked about the purpose of

their visit, if any.

Table 5.23: Percentage distribution of reasons for nearest neighbour visiting Vettuvan family, Engandiyour, 1997

Type of visit	Reasons for visiting						
	General conversation	Work-related	Attend functions only	Watch TV	Borrow money/ goods	Fetch water	Others[a]
Nair visiting Vettuvan	–	100	–	–	–	–	–
Ezavan visiting Vettuvan	43	27	5	5	13	–	7
Christian visiting Vettuvan	23	46	8	8	–	–	15
Muslim visiting Vetttuvan	50	13	31	–	–	–	6

Note: [a]To seek help for any matter, emergency; – indicates no case in that category; all rows add to 100 per cent.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

The analysis provided in this section reveals that a significant proportion of Vettuvans and non-Vettuvans visited each other. However, there was still a distance between the Vettuvans and non-Vettuvans, mostly in economic and educational levels. The analysis and interviews with Vettuvans indicate that unless the educational and economic positions of the Vettuvans improve, the social gap between the Vettuvans and the non-Vettuvans in the village will most likely remain unchanged in the years to come. Although the economic and social situation of the Vettuvans has improved since the traditional caste system changed in the village, their relative economic position compared to the non-Vettuvan communities in 1997 remained almost unchanged.

Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus-group discussions, and participant observations were used to assess the social and economic status of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour. Participant observation at various functions in the village revealed that Vettuvans participated in various social functions of non-Vettuvans. These occasions included marriages, death ceremonies, birthdays and house warming. On such occasions, Vettuvans sat and dined with everyone who participated in the function, irrespective of caste or religion. This would have been unthinkable up to the 1960s. In those days Vettuvans received only the leftovers from functions

organised by non-Vettuvans. Vettuvans were never invited to any non-Vettuvan social functions, and if they attended it was to work. Everything has changed since the 1970s when significant changes in the social and economic relations in Engandiyour began. In 1997, without a formal invitation, no Vettuvan would attend any function organised by either a non-Vettuvan or a Vettuvan.

An educated Vettuvan family in the village interacted with non-Vettuvan families more frequently and intensively than a less educated Vettuvan family. If a Vettuvan family was educated, its economic and caste status was less important to interaction with non-Vettuvans. The value attached to education in the village was so great that educated families had become more respectable than economically prosperous families.

Compared to education, slightly less important was the association between economic position of the Vettuvan family and their interaction with non-Vettuvans. Interviews revealed that economically better off Vettuvan families without education did not have frequent social and economic interaction with non-Vettuvans. An exception was the richest family in the village which, ironically, was Vettuvan. It was found that this Vettuvan family was paid respect in the village by the upper-caste communities. Upper-caste people visited this family's temple during a festival that the Vettuvans organised each year, spending several thousands of rupees.

No element of caste *per se* could be seen as a point to discriminate against Vettuvans in the village. The Vettuvans' status in 1997 was that of the working class. What made the Vettuvans different from the rest of the communities in the village in 1997 was their poor economic, educational and occupational status. The awareness of this situation strongly fuels aspirations for further social mobility among the Vettuvans.

5.5 Conclusions

In the present chapter the micro-institutional environment of Engandiyour village been described with a view to assessing how it helps shape the mobility, costs and benefits of children, and ultimately the fertility patterns. Overall, Engandiyour, the study village, represents a microcosm of Kerala. For example, as in Kerala, in the early decades of the twentieth century Engandiyour displayed social and economic relationships based on the principles of the caste system. The subsistence economy and the caste system prevailing in those days pushed the scheduled castes and other lower-caste communities to the lowest social and economic strata of society. The Vettuvans, who form the largest scheduled-caste community in Engandiyour were untouchables and unapproachables to upper-caste Hindus until the early decades of the twentieth century. The reform activities throughout Kerala seems to have abolished some of the caste-system-based subordinate behaviour of the lower castes in Engandiyour in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, in the 1950s and 1960s the Vettuvans continued to suffer from economic backwardness and social seclusion. In the 1970s, when the land reform was implemented in Engandiyour, the caste-system-based social and economic relationships began to change rapidly. During the late 1970s, the village witnessed several behavioural changes, occupational changes, and an increase in wages among the Vettuvans. Thus, a non-traditional caste system society in Engandiyour evolved in the 1970s replacing the traditional caste system, providing opportunities for social and economic mobility to the Vettuvans.

A major factor that made these changes sustainable and opened the possibility of further improvements was the Gulf migration from Engandiyour. From the late 1970s this further consolidated the caste system changes brought about by land reform. Although the Vettuvans did not take part in the Gulf migration in a significant way, the remittances into the village brought significant changes in their social and economic status. High demand for Vettuvans' labour and their economic independence in the village were the pivotal forces that changed the social subordination of the Vettuvans in Engandiyour. These two forces, the land reform and Gulf migration, reinforced each other in making Engandiyour a non-traditional caste system society. In 1997, caste in Engandiyour is limited to official purposes and not a significant part of the daily life of people. In 1997, no one could prevent a Vettuvan from taking up any prestigious occupation. The effect of this new institutional setting on the Vettuvans' aspirations for further social mobility and thereby on their fertility is the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 6

The Vettuvan Family: Caste-System Changes, Marriage, Family Systems, Sex-Roles, and Mobility Strategies

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 showed that caste in Engandiyour is no longer the sole determinant of each individual's life chances. However, although caste-based bondage has been abolished, the relative social and economic position of the Vettuvans remained little changed in 1997. With caste-system changes, however, it became possible for the Vettuvans to climb the social and economic ladder and to aspire for social and economic advancement. This aspiration of the Vettuvans is examined in the context of family systems in the present chapter. The objective of this chapter is to examine the family systems of the Vettuvans in the traditional and non-traditional caste systems: it examines the sex-roles in the families in the traditional-and non-traditional caste systems, the position of Vettuvan women and men in the family and the implications for fertility. The old-age support received by the elderly Vettuvans is examined in this chapter to understand the role of family. The constraints posed by the land reform and Gulf migration to family division are discussed as a motivation for fertility control. The strategies of the Vettuvan families for their social and economic mobility are discussed in the last section of the chapter. But to begin, the chapter looks at the role of marriage in the new institutional setting that faces the Vettuvans.

6.2 Marriage practices of the Vettuvans

6.2.1 Marriage practices in the 1950s and the 1960s

Interviews with elderly Vettuvans revealed that among the Vettuvans, particularly the poorest, the form of marriage practice during the 1950s and 1960s was mostly *oodipokal*[1], or elopement. The traditional marriage practices of the Vettuvans at the beginning of the twentieth century described by Iyer (1909) and Thurston (1909), however, did not mention elopement-type marriages. It may be possible that elopement-marriage had become common only by the 1950s and 1960s. During my field work I interviewed men and women who eloped in the late 1960s[2]. They said that they had eloped because their families were very poor and it might not have been possible to have an arranged marriage. Interviews with elderly Vettuvans revealed that elopement details were usually known to parents and/or close relatives of the bride and groom, but they ignored them because it was understood that this was the only way their daughters could get married. After elopement the couple usually stayed with one of the married sisters of the groom[3]; the usual practice was to stay there for two or three days. By that time most of the relatives and friends of both bride and the groom would have learnt about the elopement; after a few days, generally the bride's brother or a close relative would visit her and invite them to their home. If such things happened it was understood that their marriage had been recognised by the bride's family. If the alliance that the son made was according to their status (and not affected by an inter-family rivalry), then the groom's parents would recognise the marriage, and they were able return to his parents' house and live there. But if the son made an alliance with a rival family, often the groom's parents would not permit the couple to live with them, and in that case the couple would live with the bride's family and eventually build a separate hut.

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[1]Meaning 'run away'.

[2]It was not practically possible to find out how many couples in the present sample had married by elopement because they did not like to disclose this information. In 1997 elopement was considered by Vettuvans as an inappropriate and lower-status way of marriage. It was through key informants that I could identify eight men who were married by elopement. In one case when the key informant reported that a particular couple was married by elopement, the couple denied this and were unhappy about the informant's view of their marriage.

[3]Elopement and arranged marriages were not permitted within the same lineage among the Vettuvans. While cross-cousin elopements were permitted, parallel cousins were considered brothers and sisters. Widow remarriage was forbidden for women. But men could marry their wife's sister should they have no children, or should their wife die. Divorce has been uncommon among the Vettuvans.

Elopement by its very nature was difficult to practise for very young boys and girls, say below 17 or 18 years, for the following reasons. First, the opportunity to meet and form friendships was possible only when both men and women went to work without being accompanied by parents. Secondly, the decision to elope involved courage, determination, and some money. Taking into account the economic and social conditions that prevailed in the village at the time, only couples in their twenties could make elopement a manageable prospect. This suggests that the poor economic conditions that prevailed among the Vettuvans actually raised the age at marriage rather than lowering it. The median age at first marriage of men and women aged 45-49 was 19 and 26 years, respectively[4]. The age at marriage given by Iyer for Vettuvan women was 12-15 years and for men 16-20 years in the early twentieth century (Iyer, 1909:129). Since age at marriage at the beginning of the twentieth century was lower, it may be possible to argue that in those days the Vettuvans did not practise elopement. However, further investigation is needed to confirm this argument.

In the 1950s and 1960s arranged marriages were usually performed among Vettuvan families who could afford the expenses of marriage. Such marriages were usually arranged at early ages, often below 18 years for women and below 20 years for men. Until the late 1970s the economic position of the Vettuvans in the village was very weak as they had not yet recovered from the economic subordination posed by the caste system. The changes that have taken place in the marriage practices of the Vettuvans since their economic and social position has improved are discussed in the next section.

6.2.2 Marriage practices in non-traditional caste system

Marriage by elopement has disappeared from the Vettuvan community since the 1970s, and arranged marriages[5] have been common. Marriages have been monogamous and near-universal, but not early. Although cross-cousin marriages were socially approved, such marriages are reported to be very rare. In fact, marriage between relatives in Kerala as a whole according to the 1992-93 NFHS was only about 9 per cent of ever-married women compared with 16.4 in India as a whole (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:52; IIPS, 1995:87). There appears

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[4]In contrast, in some of the North Indian states child marriages were very common among the lower socio-economic sections of the society. In fact, one reason for child marriages being promoted in those states has been to reduce the burden of dowry. As the age of the bride increases, so too does the dowry (Misra and Saseendran, 1987).

[5]Marriages organised by parents of both bride and groom.

to be an urge among the Vettuvans to conduct marriages similar to those of caste Hindus in Engandiyour. Elopement is considered by the Vettuvans as an inferior way of marriage[6]. This may be because elopement was practised when Vettuvans were both socially and economically backward. Changes in marriage practices probably were felt by Vettuvans as an essential step in their social mobility. Along with changes in marriage practice came the introduction of dowry[7]. It was found during the field work that even a poor Vettuvan spent much more than he could comfortably afford for his daughter's marriage. The major part of the marriage expense was the *stridanam,* the dowry. In 1997 the standard dowry for a labourer was ten *pavan* (80 grams of 22 ct gold) and 10,000 rupees among the Vettuvans. The common expression for this standard *stridanam* was *pathum pathum,* ten *pavans* of gold and ten thousand rupees. Marriage lunch expenses would be around Rs.5,000 to 7,500 depending on the number of guests. If the groom's house was more than 3-4 kilometres away from the bride's, there would be an additional 2,000 rupees for transport. Other expenses, such as printing invitation cards, making the *pandal* (stage) and decorating, can cost about Rs. 1,500. Over and above all these, one week after marriage, the bride's parents are supposed to give her a gift. During the field work the most common gift was a steel cupboard; the cheapest cupboard cost about 4,000 rupees in 1997. The total expenses of marriage of a daughter for the Vettuvans thus could be something between 55,000 and 60,000 rupees. This was much more than the ability to pay of an average Vettuvan in 1997, and most of the money needed for such occasions was borrowed from various sources. In 1997 the average debt of a household that borrowed money for the marriage of their daughter was about Rs. 15,000. Since this was the debt amount at the time of the Vettuvan Household Survey, the actual money borrowed for marriage could be higher than this, as these households may have already repaid some, particularly debt incurred in marriages which took place more than a year ago[8]. According to the Vettuvan Household Survey about 29 per cent of all the Vettuvan families surveyed had debt incurred from borrowing for the marriages of daughters. Since not all the households surveyed had such a marriage in the past five years, the actual percentage among those households which could have had a debt on daughters' marriage is likely to be higher than the 29 per cent.

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[6]For example, if an upper-caste Hindu marries by elopement, people would comment 'They have done like a Vettuvan'.

[7]The equivalent term in Sanskrit is *vara-dakshina*, meaning 'gift to the bridegroom'. Over the centuries this has become an ingrained custom in Hindu society, whereby the parents of the bride have to give considerable sums of money, golden jewellery, vessels etc. Heavy expenditures are incurred by the parents at the time of the marriage of their daughter (Srinivasan, 1995:315).

[8]According to key informants, it takes one to five years to repay the loan taken for marriages among the Vettuvans.

Two important factors facilitated the extravagance in marriages among the Vettuvans: the effects of Gulf migration and land reforms[9]. The roles of these two factors in providing money for the Vettuvans to spend on marriages were often interlinked. After the land reform, virtually every Vettuvan family in the village owned some land. That meant they could do whatever they wanted with that land—they could sell it, mortgage it, or rent it. Migration to the Gulf countries from the village, on the other hand, greatly increased effective money supply and thus raised land prices very high. Under such circumstances the Vettuvans could sell their land at higher prices or could mortgage it for a higher value. In either case they could get a major portion of the funds required for the marriage.

6.2.3 Marital status and age at first marriage

The marital status of Vettuvans as recorded in the Household Survey is shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. About two-fifths of males and slightly over a quarter of females were currently married. Early marriages were uncommon among the Vettuvans aged 15 years and above. In the age group 15-19, 99 per cent of males and about 91 per cent of females were never-married. About 15 per cent of females and 5 per cent of males were unmarried in the age group 40 and over.

Interviews and focus-group discussion with Vettuvans revealed that the most important reasons for both men and women not marrying in the Vettuvan community in Engandiyour were a physical handicap, poor health due to disease, or very poor economic conditions[10]. Physical problems for example, were paralysis due to polio, very poor health due to tuberculosis, or some other disease. Economic difficulty in marrying because parents had many daughters, and family responsibilities or obligations, are some of the reasons for men and women remaining unmarried[11].

The proportion of women widowed indicates that women began to lose their husbands from early ages. The proportion of women who were widowed was about 7 per cent in the age group 30-34 which increased to over half for age 50 years and over. For men the proportion of widowers in the age group 50 and over was about

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[9]Chapter 5 gives a detailed account of Gulf migration and land reform in Engandiyour.
[10]Some of the respondents in the study reported that in the past parents who had many daughters found even a minute handicap an excuse for them not to marry.
[11]Similar findings were reported by Jayasree (1989).

11 per cent, a much lower level compared to women in the same age group as is expected given higher male mortality. There was only one case of divorce each for men and women in the study sample.

Median age at marriage for males and females is given in the last column of Tables 6.1 and 6.2. The median age at first marriage is used instead of the mean age at marriage because the median, unlike the mean, is not biased by age truncation. That means, in the age cohort 25-29 (Table 6.1) mean age of first marriage will be ultimately influenced by marriages that occur in this age cohort after the survey. But the median age at first marriage for the age cohort will not be so affected because more than 50 per cent of the women in the cohort were married before age 20.

The median age at first marriage for women does not show any marked increase across various age cohorts. This confirms the suggestion made earlier in this chapter that the introduction of dowry and the desire of the Vettuvans to conduct the wedding in an expensive manner kept the marriage age at a higher level. The median age at first marriage of men shows a similar pattern to that of women.

Table 6.1: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan women according to their marital status and median age at first marriage, Engandiyour, 1997

Age of women at the time of survey (years)	Never married	Currently married	Widowed	Median age at marriage
15-19[a]	91.3	8.7	--	nc
20-24	51.0	49.0	--	nc
25-29[b]	20.1	78.2	1.0	20
30-34	14.0	78.9	7.0	20
35-39	5.1	91.0	3.8	19
40-44	9.6	79.0	11.5	20
45-49	2.2	85.0	13.3	19
50+	3.6	45.1	50.6	n.a
Total	28.3	57.6	14.0	19

Notes: There was one case of divorce in the age group 25-29 for males.
[a]No marriage took place before age 15 years. [b]More than 50 per cent of women in this age group were married by the age that defines the lower boundary of the age group.
nc = not calculated because fewer than 50 per cent in this age cohort were unmarried.

Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

Table 6.2: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan men according to their marital status and median age at first marriage, Engandiyour, 1997

Age group	Never married	Currently married	Widowed	Median age at marriage
15-19	99.0	1.0	--	nc
20-24	94.0	6.0	--	nc
25-29	57.0	42.0	--	nc
30-34[a]	25.0	75.0	--	25.9
35-39	14.0	86.0	--	26.5
40-44	1.8	92.8	5.4	24.7
45-49	2.0	98.0	--	25.9
50+	1.5	87.6	10.9	--
Total	38.5	58.8	2.6	24.6

Notes: There was one case of divorce in the age group 25-29 for males.
nc = not calculated because fewer than 50 per cent in this age cohort were unmarried.
[a]More than 50 per cent of men in this age group were married by the age that defines lower boundary.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

The singulate mean age at marriage, SMAM, calculated using age-specific proportions never married for age groups 15-19 to 45-49 (United Nations, 1998:225-229) for males and females is shown in Table 6.3. The value of SMAM in 1997 was 29.2 years for males and 23.9 for females. According to the 1992-93 NFHS the SMAM values for Kerala males and females were 28.1 and 22.1, respectively. It may be noted here that the minimum legal marriage age in India stipulated by the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1978 was 18 years for females and 21 years for males (Misra and Saseendran, 1987). Clearly, the Vettuvans have been marrying at ages higher than prescribed by the law.

Table 6.3: Singulate mean age at marriage, Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

	Males	Females	Difference
Vettuvan	29.2	23.9	5.3
Kerala	28.1	22.1	6.0

Notes: SMAM was calculated using the procedure given in *Manual X, Indirect Techniques for Demographic Estimation* (United Nations, 1983:225-229).
Sources: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997; PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:47

6.3 The family systems

One of the continuing debates on family systems is about the transition of the family from joint to nuclear and the causes of such changes (Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell, 1988:108). The 1931 Census report of the Madras Presidency noted that the joint family system was weakening in south India in those days. Evidence suggests that in Kerala the joint family system has eroded in a notable way among the upper-caste Nair and Namboodiri communities. The traditional joint family called Nair *taravad* and Namboodiri *illam* once accommodated a large number of people (Fuller, 1976:52). Today it scarcely exists. However, there is a scarcity of literature about family systems of other communities, particularly the lower castes, in Kerala.

Despite the loosening of the joint family system in Kerala, household size has been increasing. For example, average household size increased from 5.3 to 6.0 during the period 1951-1971 (Singh, 1985:36). In 1992-93, the average household size stood at 5.7 (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995:28).

There are several views on what constitutes various family types. In this work definitions of various family types by Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988) are adopted.

(i) In this study the term nuclear family will mean a conjugal couple with their unmarried children.
Extended nuclear family: Conjugal couple, their unmarried children and other relatives or persons.

(ii) A stem family will describe two married couples in different generations.

Extended stem family: Two married couples in different generations, and other relatives or persons.

Eroded stem family: Two married couples in different generations, their widowed mother or father.

Extended eroded stem family: Two married couples in different generations, their widowed mother or father and other relatives.

(iii) A joint family refers to married siblings living together.

A joint stem family: Older couple has with them more than one of their married children and usually grandchildren as well.

Extended joint stem family: Older couple has with them more than one of their married children, grandchildren and other relatives.

6.3.1 Family systems under the traditional caste system

Among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour there is no evidence of any joint family system during the traditional-caste-system period[12]. My interviews with senior members of the Vettuvan community indicated that they had stem and nuclear families more commonly than any other family type. Their lower-caste as well as tenancy status in the village may have limited the need for a large family. As described above Vettuvans, until about the early 1970s, were tenants of the Ezavas or the upper castes[13]. Under the tenancy arrangements, the Vettuvans had no ownership of land but could build a hut on the property of landlords and live there as a *kudikidappukaran* or tenant. In such an arrangement, landlords did not seem to object to any new hut being built on their property as this had no effect on the ownership status of the land. Rather it enhanced the potential care of the property that was occupied. People in the village believed that human contact improved land quality and hence would enhance yields. It was the requirement of a tenant to care for the coconut gardens around his hut. Tenancy would also increase the loyalty of the tenant family to the landlord. Over and above this, once the tenancy was granted, the tenants were liable to work in the households of the landlords for no pay doing such work as sweeping the courtyard, washing utensils in the morning, filling water

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[12]Accounts provided by Thurston (1909) do not indicate a joint family system for the Vettuvans of Kerala in the late 19th century.

[13]It may be recalled here that tenancy was abolished in the village when the land reforms were implemented during the 1970s.

containers, cleaning cow sheds and feeding animals[14].

Interviews with elderly Vettuvans revealed that the division of a Vettuvan family under tenancy did not involve property division as the land was not owned by them. Since the Vettuvans did not own land, they did not possess agricultural equipment. The only assets they owned were some clay pots and a few metal utensils. Thus, family division and formation of a nuclear family were less complicated in those days.

The common practice of partition among the Vettuvans was that the eldest son built a separate hut when he began to have children or once the younger brother married, whichever came earlier. Often the hut was made on the same piece of land and on the property of his parent's landlord. Sometimes if the landlord had an unoccupied *parambu,* or a piece of land in some other location, he would ask the new tenant to live there. The size of the hut was referred to by respondents as the main cause for the eldest son to build a new hut. Interviews with elderly Vettuvans revealed that small huts were insufficient to accommodate the large number of members. A typical hut in the past consisted of a small room that could be treated as a bedroom where the head of the household slept; another common room where children and other members slept; a small kitchen; and a yard. The yard was generally used by couples, if there were any. Why did the Vettuvans confine themselves to small huts? What prevented them from having larger huts? In the traditional caste system period raw materials for making huts were limited to locally grown bamboo and coconut. Given the Vettuvans' lower social and economic status, they had no access to skilled workers to build huts for them: they had to build their own huts. Since they did not have professional skills they could build only small huts with the raw materials given to them by their landlords. Therefore, the quantity of raw materials available ultimately decided the size of the hut. The landlords were very concerned about the size of the hut the Vettuvans built; a bigger hut meant higher status. According to elderly Vettuvans, the upper-caste landlords never liked the Vettuvans, their tenants, increasing their social status by making larger huts. All this meant that the Vettuvans had to have small huts and that they had to make separate living arrangements once their family size increased[15].

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[14]The number of tasks would depend on the number of tenants the land owner had. See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion about the tenant-landlord relationship.

[15]In the old Kerala, the right to build two-storey houses and to tile their roofs was reserved for the high castes and great Syrian Christian or Mappila families (Jeffrey, 1992:205).

Furthermore, because the Vettuvans were tenants, they did not require a large joint family to take care of a large area of agricultural property. For example, Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988) have shown that in Karnataka villages large families were valued as an asset by families as they had large areas of agricultural land[16].

Yet another reason that promoted nuclear and stem families in the traditional-caste-system period was the entitlement that each tenant household had from their landlord. For example, the landlord provided rice, vegetables, bananas, and money during *onam*, the harvest festival, and *vishu,* the Malayalam new year, to each of their tenant households. It was the right of tenant families to have such contribution from their landlord. Therefore, the more households, the more the entitlements[17].

In summary, the caste system that prevailed in Engandiyour until the middle of the twentieth century was not conducive to a large joint family system for the Vettuvans. Rather it promoted nuclear and stem families. Before family systems in the non-traditional caste system are discussed, an examination of family relationships in the caste-system period is essential.

6.3.2 Sex roles and family relationships under the traditional caste system

Among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour, during the traditional-caste-system period, the separation of the eldest son from the parental family marked the end of parental control over the son. Respondents said that parents did not play any role in the day-to-day functions of their separated son's family. Where the separated son was in the same or a nearby *parambu*, piece of land, his children normally spent their day time with their grandparents. Also there was a great deal of co-operation in terms of mutual assistance in supplying food and physical help whenever needed. Separation of the son from the parents did not mark any emotional detachment from parents; rather, respondents suggested that such separations made the relationships between parents and sons stronger because they did not involve conflicts of interests between parents and son.

As indicated, the departure of a son to his new hut denoted the withdrawal of formal control of the father over the matters related to his son's family. Since the separation usually took place when the sons were in their late 20s, a considerable part of their

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[16]Mamdani (1972) showed similar findings from Manupur village in Punjab. See Nag and Kak (1984) for an examination of Manupur in the changed social and economic setting in 1982 to early 1970s.

[17]Number of members does not matter much in this case.

reproductive life was spent in a nuclear-type family arrangement. Culturally, it was *padilyathathu,* a taboo, for a father to talk about anything that had sexual meaning. In this context, the father had no role, direct or indirect, in aspects of his sons' reproduction.

The study in Engandiyour revealed that the role of mothers-in-law in moulding the behaviour of their daughters-in-law was also limited. During the traditional-caste-system period, an unmarried girl of 18-19 years would have spent at least 3-4 years as a full-time labourer in the village. No Vettuvan girl in this age group would have escaped from working, as the caste system demanded work from the Vettuvans. These girls were socialised in their work places[18] about the role of a wife, a mother and a daughter-in-law. The work place also provided information about sex, contraception, and marriage to young girls through their married friends or elderly colleagues. These girls knew about the whole range of domestic work as they helped their parents with household work from a very early age. There was very little that they needed to know from their mothers-in-law. Moreover both daughter-in-law and mother-in-law were income-earning members of the family. Since marriages usually took place within the same village or neighbouring villages, the girl would normally know everyone in the prospective husband's family either as her workplace companions or as a villager. In summary, a Vettuvan girl was very well equipped to handle all aspects of married life well before her marriage. The implication for the position of women, particularly daughters-in-law, is that she enjoyed a high social and economic status in her in-laws' family. Such arrangements seem to have made mothers-in-law less powerful in moulding the behaviour of their daughters-in-law.

Culturally, it was *padilyathathu,* or taboo, for a mother-in-law to discuss sex-related topics with her daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law's ideas about how many children she would have was influenced by the groups of women with whom she worked. If she violated the group norms with regard to fertility, or for that matter any behaviour, she was subjected to gossip and teasing.

Under the caste system, a Vettuvan man had a limited role in deciding his own affairs. The role of family head, *karanavar*[19], was mostly to arrange his family work force for the landlord. Although decisions were taken by the family head about the marriage of a son or daughter, he had to seek consent from the landlord, because

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[18]The work place could be a rice field or coconut plantation. Normally a particular group of women and men worked together on most occasions. This was especially the case when the landlord had many tenants and plenty of land.

[19]*Karanavar* among the Vettuvans means the oldest man in the family.

without his permission it was impossible to conduct a marriage. It was the landlord who lent money and goods to his tenants on occasions such as marriage and death ceremonies. The availability of resources from the landlord and his willingness[20] to provide support decided the timing of a Vettuvan marriage. Thus, the caste system seems to have influenced the family relationships to a greater degree than did the structure of the family.

It is evident from the above sections that the family systems, sex roles and family relations that existed among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour during the traditional caste system were determined by the social and economic organisation guided by the caste system. The family systems, sex roles and family in the non-traditional-caste system are discussed below with emphasis on the situation in 1997.

6.3.3 The family systems in the caste-system-free period

The family of the Vettuvans is called *kudumbam;* the family head is called *kudumbanadhan* or *karanavar*. Traditionally, the family is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal. The lineage is traced through the males and each lineage forms a *tharavad*. Marriages are normally not permitted between members of the same *tharavad*, as members of one *tharavad* are considered brothers and sisters. The rule of residence dictates that sons remain with their parents after marriage, while daughters leave their parents upon marriage and join their husbands in their family. Parental property (no land during tenancy) and the family name are inherited by the sons. Daughters have no right to inherit parental property or the family name. How far do such traditions persist? What are their implications for security and mobility goals and strategies?

The Vettuvan family systems in 1997 identified from the household survey of the Vettuvans are shown in Table 6.4. Definitions of family systems by Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988), as discussed earlier in this chapter, are used in the present classification. The predominant family type revealed in the household survey is various forms of nuclear family. Slightly over two-fifths of the families were in this category. The typical nuclear family among the Vettuvans consists of one couple and their unmarried children. They account for over four-fifths of the nuclear families. The second important type is a form of extended nuclear family, consisting of a couple, their unmarried children and other relatives. About 9 per

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[20]For example, if there was a death in the family of the landlord he would not permit any marriage to take place before the first death anniversary, *sardham.*

cent of the total nuclear families were of this type. No other family type was common.

The nuclear families of the Vettuvans in most of the cases were formed as a result of the separation of the eldest son and his family from the parental family. The marriage of a younger brother or brothers was often a point at which the eldest son's family considered separation. While the partition of a joint family is inevitable at some point in time, the causes of partition at a particular time is often a family dispute. Increased cost of living and the increased living standards[21] exacerbated family disputes. Couples who had children reported that they found it hard to meet the various demands of children and other family members (husband's parents, brothers and their family, and other relatives) with their wages. Such couples thought that once they had their own household it would be easier for them to care for their children better. This feeling was very strong among those who were prime earners in the undivided family.

In 1997, great importance was attached to education in Engandiyour[22]. It was the aspiration of the Vettuvans to give children better education and care, along with a good standard of living, that motivated them to move to a nuclear family. How was the aspiration to have a nuclear-family arrangement able to become a reality in at least about two-fifths of the surveyed households? As indicated in Chapter 2, although land reform in Kerala was implemented in the 1970s, land reform initiatives were begun strongly by 1957, when the Communist government[23] was formed. Interviews with elderly Vettuvans and local council officials in Engandiyour revealed that no new tenancy was granted in the village after the late 1950s. Thus there could have been an increase in the number of members in each household, even though fertility was declining. Similarly, there could have been more nuclear-family units (husband, wife, and children) living together. When they received land through the land reform, they were able to divide it and have separate living arrangements. Thus, the formation of nuclear families in the 1970s has been possible primarily because of the land reform. The Gulf migration from the village also helped to form nuclear families, as some Vettuvans were able to sell their land for higher prices and buy cheaper land to divide between brothers.

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[21]See Chapter 3 for a discussion on costs and living standards among the Vettuvans and in the study village.

[22]Chapter 7 has a more detailed discussion of education among the Vettuvans.

[23]See Chapter 3 for details.

In the 1997 Vettuvan Household Survey, slightly less than one-third of the households were stem families. There are two common stem family types among the Vettuvans: (i) one couple, their unmarried children and the husband's widowed mother; (ii) one couple, their unmarried children and the husband's parents. These two types account for about 67 per cent of the total number of stem families. The stem family pattern among the Vettuvans has resulted from the separation of the eldest brother's family from the parental family. When the eldest brother's family became nuclear, the remaining parental family with the other younger brothers became a stem family. This process, however, depends on how many sons the couple have, and how many of them are married.

About 12 per cent of families in the surveyed households were joint families. The most common type of joint family consisted of two married siblings, their unmarried children and widowed mother. About one-third of the families of the joint-family type had this particular composition. One important reason for many couples remaining in the joint family as revealed from interviews with Vettuvans was the economic hardship in obtaining land, housing and household items. Higher land prices following the Gulf migration have made it practically impossible to buy a housing plot in the village from the savings of a labourer or a semi-skilled worker. Land reform, on the other hand, has denied access to the previously enjoyed freedom to build huts on the landlord's property as a tenant.

About 14 per cent of families among the Vettuvans do not fall into any of the categories in the present classification. However, a major category emerged consisting of a widow and her unmarried children. This accounted about three-fifths of the 'other family types'.

Table 6.4: Family structure of the Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Family type	**Number and Percentage**
Nuclear family	151 (44.4)
One couple only	7
One couple and their unmarried children	131
Extended nuclear family	
One couple, their unmarried children and other relatives[a]	13
Eroded nuclear family	
Stem family	103 (30.3)
One couple, their unmarried children, husband's parents	30
One couple and husband's parents	2
Extended stem family	
One couple, their unmarried children, husband's parents, husband's unmarried brother/sister	3
One couple, husband's parents, husband's unmarried brother/sister	3
One couple, their unmarried children, husband's parent (either father or mother), husband's unmarried brother/sister	12
Eroded stem-family	
One couple and husband's widowed mother	2
One couple, their unmarried children, husband's widowed mother	40
One couple, their unmarried children, husband's widowed father	2
Extended eroded stem family	
One couple, their unmarried children, widowed mother, husband's brother	5
One couple, widowed mother, husband's unmarried brother/sister	4

Table 6.4 continued

Joint family	40 (11.8)
Two or more married brothers and their wives, their unmarried children	5
Joint stem family	
Two married brothers and their wives, their unmarried children, their parents	8
Two married brothers and their wives, their unmarried children, their widowed mother	14
Two married brothers and their wives, their unmarried children, their widowed father	4
Two married brothers and their wives, their parents	3
Three married brothers and their wives, their unmarried children, their parents	5
Extended joint stem family	
Two married brothers and their wives, their parents, their unmarried brother	1
Other types	46(13.5)
Widow and unmarried children	26
Widow only	2
Unmarried single male	5
Widowed mother, widowed daughter and daughter's children	3
Unmarried siblings	9
Widow, her sister's children	1
Total	**340**

Note: Classification based on Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988:111); [a]wife's brother, wife's mother.
Source: Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997.

Sex-roles in the non-traditional caste system

The prevailing family systems of the Vettuvans have influenced the relationships between members in each family type. Traditionally, Vettuvan women enjoyed a relatively equal partnership with their husbands in family affairs. Evidence gathered during field work suggests that Vettuvan women still enjoy broad equality with men in the family. For example, family expenses, such as how much money was to be spent on each food item to be purchased, were managed by women. Women reported during the focus group interviews that if men are not considered good managers of money, women take over such responsibility.

The position of women in the family can be linked to the family types prevailing among the Vettuvans. The formation of nuclear families among the Vettuvans in the non-traditional caste system was by the departure of the eldest son from his parental home. The second eldest son would leave when his younger brother married or when he started having children. However, if there was no younger brother, he would continue to live with his parents and inherit the house. Although adhering to this timetable has become difficult by 1997 owing to unavailability of landed property, this was still the most preferred timetable for partition among brothers. The average duration of stay of a married couple with the husband's parents was two to three years. That means couples did not spend a significant part of their reproductive life in their parents' house; this has had a tremendous influence on the role of women in the family. The separated family normally consisted of husband, wife and young children. Since the husband's parents had no direct control over the day-to-day activities of the separated family, women had a considerable role to perform in areas of family management. This situation prevented mothers-in-law controlling the behaviour of their daughters-in-law[24].

Regarding a married younger brother who lived with his parents, as a member of a stem family, the role of the mother-in-law was also limited. Since the average age at marriage of males in Engandiyour was around 25 years in 1997, by the time the younger brother married his parents had normally reached 50-55 years of age. In the age group 50 and over, over half of the women were widows and nearly one-fifth of the men were widowers. Also, because a mother-in-law would not, in most cases, earn as much as a daughter-in-law, the economic leverage of mothers-in-law was limited. It is likely that such a situation would result in lessened authority of

[24]The role of mothers-in-law in moulding the behaviour of daughters-in-law is documented in literature as a factor influencing higher fertility in northern India.

mothers-in-law over their daughters-in-law. Thus, Vettuvan women enjoy a relatively independent life, without being controlled by their mothers-in-law. The survey of Vettuvan households in Engandiyour indicated that in about three-quarters of the families, a currently married woman did not have a resident mother-in-law.

Traditionally, the overall responsibility for the family among the Vettuvans has been with women. This continued in 1997. For example, men brought in money, but when they were unemployed for several days, it was often the women who found ways to feed the family. Men generally did not keep track of the availability of food grains and the other groceries necessary for daily use at home; it was women who did all this. Women had the ability to save food grains for the rainy season, when normally the men do not get enough work. It was women who usually borrowed money from neighbours and friends. People in the village trusted Vettuvan women more than Vettuvan men regarding repayment. It is possible that the family system that prevailed among the Vettuvans promotes a significant role of women in family matters.

While women enjoyed considerable autonomy, they also took the predominant role in carrying out domestic tasks. Equality does not generally extend to housework. It was women who prepared food, and served their husbands, children and parents-in-law. Women ate last with any other female members of the family, excluding their mothers-in-law. Leftovers normally constituted the major portion of their food. There was a strong belief and pride among the Vettuvan women in their responsibility to see that everyone in the family had enough to eat[25].

It was also the responsibility of women to wash the clothes of all the family, bring water for both drinking and washing, clean the house and look after children. In joint families women generally did such activities jointly.

Since slightly over two-fifths of the Vettuvan families were nuclear, there was hardly anyone to help women with household work. If the woman was a labourer, she had to do all these jobs once she returned from work. If she had a grown-up non-school-going daughter, she would get some assistance from her. Otherwise, it was women's responsibility to do all household work. As a result of government efforts to supply water to those with limited access to water, these days there are public water taps available within 2-3 minutes walk from most households. This has

[25]In the focus-group discussions this point was discussed at length. All women participating agreed to their role in the family.

reduced the burden of women to some extent.

Vettuvan women play an important role even outside their family. When children and parents-in-law fall sick, it is generally the women who take them to the local doctor, obtain medicines, and look after them[26]. Even though the role of women was so important in their family, their role in social life was limited. For example, if only one person was invited from a family to attend a social function, it was men who generally attended that function. Women would not go alone to such functions; they would have to be accompanied by a family member.

Vettuvan women were well informed about many events happening locally, regionally and even nationally. Women were usually seen shopping in the nearby shops in the evenings, normally after they returned from work. When they went shopping they often met their friends, relatives, and members from other communities. Such activities were very important because they provided an opportunity for new information to be exchanged. Information may be about immunisation of children, side-effects of contraceptives, family politics, children's education, or even about national politics. Such informal chats constitute very important communication networks. Field observation indicated that these practices were not common in other communities in the village.

In the 1997 context, it appeared that a Vettuvan woman had no incentive for having many children, because of her responsibilities in the family. The increasing importance of education among Vettuvans made the household responsibilities of women more onerous. Women in the focus-group interviews strongly believed that women should have only that number of children for whom they can provide good education, good food, and thus, a good future. The Vettuvan women's role in the family seems to be a strong reason for these women desiring few children.

The most pertinent question regarding family type here is its relationship with fertility. However, it is difficult to establish any simple relationship between fertility and family type, because each woman spends her reproductive span in different family situations (Bebarta, 1977:16). For example, among the Vettuvans, marriage invariably leads to residence in the groom's parental home. Normally, the couple spends two to three years there before they move out into a new house. Fertility data

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[26]Rajan *et al.* (1996:287) demonstrated that in Kerala women take initiatives in health care only during an emergency. Among the Vettuvans it is just the opposite: men take initiatives when it is an emergency.

indicate that about 63 per cent of Vettuvan women conceived within three months and nearly 92 per cent within two years of their marriage (see Table 4.8). Thus, reproduction began when the couple spent their first few years after marriage in the husband's parental house, as there was no time lag between marriage and consummation[27] of marriage among the Vettuvans. In the 1997 survey of Vettuvan wives, the average age at sterilisation was 25.5 years, and 85 per cent of women were sterilised before age 30 years. Thus, if a newly married Vettuvan couple lived with their parents for two to three years, and the average age of female marriage was 19.7 years, it is possible that at least the first birth would have taken place when the women were living with their in-laws. The nuclear family arrangement, considered from the point of view of women's reproduction, is the place where her reproduction ends. The joint and stem families seen in this survey are thus a transitory family arrangement for the few years when she is newly married and having her first child. Thus, overall, it was the family relationships based on the nuclear family that had influenced the fertility behaviour of the Vettuvans most decisively, as fertility usually terminated when they were in the nuclear rather than joint or stem families.

6.3.4 Constraints in family division

In any family system, household division is an important and potentially decisive matter. For some families partition was very difficult because of the very small size of land holding. As revealed in the household survey, about a quarter of the Vettuvans owned less than four cents,[28] and slightly over half owned from five to seven cents of land. It was practically impossible to divide property for at least a quarter of the families, where they had only four cents or less. They would have to find land somewhere else should they want partition to take place. For the nearly half of the households which had five to seven cents of land, division would be possible but difficult, as the land would be too small to accommodate two normal huts[29]. Thus, three-fourths of the Vettuvan households would find it effectively impossible to partition their land. This is likely to become even more difficult for future generations.

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[27]In many parts of India there is a time lag between age at marriage and consummation. See Misra and Saseendran (1987).

[28]100 cents =1 acre; 1 acre=0.40469 hectare.

[29]This issue needs to be considered in relation to the economic position of the Vettuvans and their traditional ways of making huts. For example, 5-7 cents of land may be too small for a hut but sufficient to accommodate several families if they construct a multi-storey block of flats.

The survey data show that over nine-tenths of households that had less than seven cents of land were nuclear, stem or 'other' family types. That means the division of the property in these families would be between children of the household head and not between the brothers of the household head (the effect of the family life-cycle). In such a situation the household heads can avoid or delay the partition among their children if they control their fertility and plan for their children's careers. For example, if they produce only one child, there will be no partition; if they have one male and one female, there will be no partition (due to patriarchy); if they have two sons, they can postpone the partition until one son settles in a job, but cannot avoid partition; but if they have more than two sons partition of the land is inevitable.

Since the land reform of 1970, some initiatives from the government of Kerala have reduced the problem of division of land among Vettuvan families. The *laksham veedu paddhathi,* or the 'one lakh housing scheme', was an initiative of the government during 1972-76 to provide free houses to economically backward scheduled castes in the *purambok*, or unoccupied government land in the village. Although exact statistics on this are not available, reliable sources indicated that some 100 houses were built and given to scheduled castes in the 1970s in Engandiyour[30]. Since there was no *purambok* available in Engandiyour in 1997, this was no longer a possibility. However, this scheme had reduced problems related to the availability of land for housing soon after the land reform was implemented in the village.

The Gulf migration since the 1970s has had two effects on the prospects of partitioning among the Vettuvans. On the negative side, the Gulf migration lessened the possible avenues for the Vettuvans to buy land because land prices rose. On the positive side, the Gulf migration enabled the Vettuvans to sell their land for higher prices and buy more land in a cheaper locality. This also averted some of the severe consequences of land shortage for houses among the Vettuvans.

In 1997, the situation in Engandiyour with regard to availability of land was alarming. The village had only 15.68 square kilometres of land. It has 6326 houses, an average density of over 400 households per square kilometre. During the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, all possible efforts were made by the government and people to cope with the demand for housing plots. For example, several of the village paddy fields were converted into housing plots. According to the 1995 data from the

[30]In Kerala as a whole about 57,000 were built during 1970-77 under the 'one lakh houses' campaign (Jeffrey, 1992:206).

village Panchayath, only two acres of land in the village was used for paddy in contrast to about 70 per cent of land area under paddy cultivation before 1970 (Engandiyour Gramapanchayath, 1996:17). Finding land for housing is a worrying problem not only for the Vettuvans, but for everyone in the village. The future of the family systems and family strategies of Vettuvans in Engandiyour will depend on these issues.

6.4 The family and the support of the elderly in the non-traditional caste system

6.4.1 Demographic status of the elderly

Within the demographic literature, considerable emphasis is given to issues of familial support for the elderly as a reason for high fertility. How far are such arguments relevant to fertility decline of Vettuvans? According to the Vettuvan Household Survey in Engandiyour, 8.7[31] per cent of the population were over 60 years of age, 5.5 over 70, and 0.6 per cent over 80. The Vettuvan Household Survey revealed that among the elderly women about 85 per cent were widows, and among the elderly men 15 per cent were widowers. This reflects the higher mortality among adult men than among adult women. These mortality differentials have significant implications for living arrangements and support, as will be discussed later.

The Elderly Vettuvan Survey covered a total of 138 elderly persons 60 years and over, 60 elderly men and 78 elderly women. Details of the Vettuvan Elderly Survey are given in Chapter 1. Age distribution of the 138 Vettuvans is given in Table 6.5.

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31 The proportion of Kerala population 60 years and above, according to the Kerala NFHS, was 8.2 per cent (PRC, Thiruvananthapuram and IIPS, 1995).

Table 6.5: Age distribution of the elderly Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Age group	Elderly men N (%)	Elderly women N (%)	Total N (%)
60-69	39 (65.0)	53 (67.9)	92 (66.7)
70-79	16 (26.7)	20 (25.7)	36 (26.1)
80+	5 (8.3)	5 (6.4)	10 (7.2)
Total	60 (100.0)	78 (100.0)	138 (100.0)

Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

Table 6.6 shows the work status of the elderly men and women among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour. As the table shows, nearly half of the elderly men and two-thirds of the women were not doing any paid or unpaid work (housework). While nearly two-fifths of the elderly men were engaged in labouring, only about one-tenth of elderly women were doing such work. Another contrast in the work status of the elderly men and women was that more elderly women were engaged in household work compared to elderly men. The analysis suggests that at least half of the elderly men in the study may not have needed any financial assistance from their children as they themselves were earning. The most dependent people in this category were the elderly women; nearly nine-tenths of them needed financial assistance from others as they were not earning anything.

Table 6.6: Work status of elderly Vettuvan men and women, Engandiyour 1997

Work status	Elderly men N (%)	Elderly women N (%)
Not doing any work	28 (47)	50 (64)
Labouring	23 (38)	7 (9)
Skilled work	5 (8)	–
Petty business	2 (3)	1 (1)
House work	2 (3)	20 (26)
Total	60 (100)	78 (100)

Notes: – indicates no cases.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

Table 6.7 shows the distribution of the elderly according to the number of living sons. Slightly over a quarter of the elderly had one living son, and about two-thirds had two or more sons at the time of the study. Thus, nearly nine-tenths of the elderly had at least one living son. Of those who did not have a living son, more of the elderly were women than men.

Table 6.7: Distribution of the elderly Vettuvans according to the number of living sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Category	Elderly men N (%)	Elderly women N (%)	Total N (%)
No living son	3 (5.0)	7 (9.5)	10 (7.5)
One living son	19 (31.7)	18 (24.3)	37 (27.6)
Two or more living sons	38 (63.3)	49 (66.2)	87 (65.0)
Total	60 (100)	74 (100)	134 (100)

Notes: Four unmarried elderly women are excluded from the analysis as childbearing is restricted to married couples in the Vettuvan community.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

Table 6.4 shows the distribution of elderly Vettuvans according to the number of living daughters. Slightly less than a quarter of the elderly had one living daughter; nearly three-fifths had two or more daughters; and slightly less than one-fifth had no daughter. Tables 6.7 and 6.8 taken together indicate that there were fewer living daughters than living sons for the elderly Vettuvans: 91 daughters for every 100 sons. Whether an elderly Vettuvan has a living son, a living daughter, or neither, has a significant influence on their living arrangements and support.

Table 6.8: Distribution of the elderly Vettuvans according to the number of living daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Category	Elderly men N (%)	Elderly women N (%)	Total N (%)
No living daughters	11 (18.3)	13 (17.6)	24 (17.9)
One living daughter	10 (16.7)	21 (28.4)	31 (23.1)
Two or more living daughters	39 (65.0)	40 (54.0)	79 (59,0)
Total	60 (100)	74 (100)	134 (100)

Notes: Four unmarried elderly women are excluded from the analysis as childbearing is restricted to married couples in the Vettuvan community.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

6.4.2 Living arrangements of the elderly

Living arrangements for the elderly are widely seen as an important measure of the extent of support from families especially for poor populations (Amin, 1998:203). Living arrangements of the elderly Vettuvans in Engandiyour are shown in Table 6.9. Nearly 87 per cent of elderly parents were staying with their sons; this was possible because in about 90 per cent of cases parents had at least one surviving son. About 7 per cent of the elderly were living with their daughters. These elderly persons had no surviving sons. The remaining 6 per cent were living with other relatives such as a sister or brother, or lived alone. These elderly people were mainly unmarried or widowed. Typically, the elderly among the Vettuvans lived with their married and unmarried sons. This, however, does not mean that they are receiving significant economic support from their sons.

Table 6.9: Living arrangements of the elderly Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

% of elderly staying with at least one son	% of elderly staying with daughter	% of elderly staying with other relatives/alone
87	7	6

Note: N=138.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

A more detailed examination of living arrangements of the elderly is given in Table 6.10. According to the table, about 70 per cent of the elderly were living with their younger married sons. In about two-fifths of the cases, at least one married son reported living separately from his parents. In the majority of the cases these were the eldest married sons, living with their spouses and children in a nuclear family, mostly in the neighbourhood of their parents' houses. About 36 per cent of the elderly had their unmarried sons living with them. In another 5 per cent of cases the elderly had an unmarried son living away from them.

Table 6.10: Living arrangements of the Vettuvan elderly with their sons, Engandiyour, 1997

% having married sons living with them	% having married sons living away from them	% having unmarried sons living with them	% having unmarried sons living away from them
70	41	36	5

Notes: N=124; percentage calculated for each category separately; 10 elderly people without a living son and four unmarried elderly women excluded from the analysis.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

The Elderly Vettuvan Survey in Engandiyour in 1997 revealed that about 63 per cent of the elderly had a married daughter living away from them with her husband (Table 6.11). Nearly 12 per cent of parents had a married daughter living with them. This situation arose because 10 elderly persons did not have a living son. We did not come across any elderly parent permanently living with their married daughter if they had a son. The generally held view about the residence of elderly parents in Engandiyour as a whole, and also among the Vettuvans, was that parents must live with their son. Both the parent and son would be the subject of gossip should they

violate this rule of residence. But if there was no married or unmarried son then it is not only right for parents to stay with a daughter, but also regarded as most appropriate. In such cases it was the daughter or daughters who shared the responsibility of caring for their parents. They would also share parental property according to their contribution to the care of their parents. It was the sole responsibility of the daughter who intended to occupy her parents' house and property to look after her parents economically. However, elderly parents who had a son did stay in their married daughter's house for a few days or on any occasions that required support from parents. Nearly a quarter of the elderly had unmarried daughters living with them. No parent had their unmarried daughters living away from them.

Table 6.11: Living arrangements of the elderly Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

% having married daughters not living with them	% having married daughter living with them	% having unmarried daughters living with them
63	12	24

Notes: N=131 (elderly having a living daughter); Percentage calculated for each category separately.
Three elderly people who did not have a living daughter and four unmarried women are excluded from the analysis.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

6.4.3 Support from sons

An examination of living arrangements alone will not give full details of the support that the elderly Vettuvans in Engandiyour receive from their children. In the non-traditional caste system the role of sons in taking care of their old parents was well defined among the Vettuvans. Sons were expected to meet all the needs of their elderly parents. To examine expectation of support from sons, a question was asked in the Elderly Vettuvan Survey of 1997 of each elderly person with a married living son about the economic support they received from their married sons. A summary of the responses is given in Table 6.12. Nearly four-fifths of the elderly parents who had living married sons received all necessary support from at least one of them. This support included food, clothing, medicine and pocket money for their other day-to-day needs. The support from the married son, however, should not be interpreted as the only source of support for the elderly. For example, if there was

more than one son in the family, it was likely that one son would get work some days and another son would get work on other days. Thus, whoever had work provided support to the parents: both the children would be treated by the parents as potential sources of necessary support.

About 4 per cent of the elderly reported that they received only practical economic support from their married sons, while about 17 per cent of parents did not receive any support[32] from married sons. In the 17 per cent were about 10 per cent of parents whose married sons were living with them, and 7 per cent whose married sons were living away from them. These elders, however, are not without support. Within the 17 per cent of elderly people who did not get support from their married sons, 5 per cent received support from unmarried sons, and 3 per cent received support from married daughters. The remaining 9 per cent were without support from any of their children. They were either working or did not want economic support from their children. Age data indicated that they were in the age group 60-69. In fact, these elderly people may have been supporting their married sons.

Table 6.12: Percentage of elderly Vettuvans receiving economic support from married sons, Engandiyour, 1997

% of the elderly receiving all necessary support from at least one married son	% of the elderly receiving some support from married son(s)	% of the elderly receiving no support from married son(s)
79	4	17

Note: N=107 (elderly with married living sons).
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

The support that the elderly received from the unmarried sons is summarised in Table 6.13. Nearly two-thirds of the elderly who had living unmarried sons received full support, from at least one of them. About one-third of the parents could not obtain any support from their unmarried children. In these cases either the unmarried son was unemployed, or the parents did not need support from their unmarried sons, or it may be that they were getting support from married sons. Interviews revealed that unmarried children who were working supported their families in whatever way they could, while those who did not support their parents

[32]This means that these parents in this study did not consider that they received anything significant that needed to be mentioned.

had no regular work or were physically handicapped or sick.

Table 6.13: Percentage of elderly Vettuvans receiving economic support from unmarried sons, Engandiyour, 1997

% of the elderly receiving all needed support from at least one unmarried son	% of the elderly receiving some support from unmarried sons	% of the elderly receiving no support from unmarried son/s
67	10	23

Note: N=55 (elderly with unmarried living sons).
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

6.4.4 Support from daughters

Table 6.14 shows the support the elderly received from their married daughters. Support from married daughters to the elderly parents, in general, was limited. Only about half the elderly parents who had living married daughters received some support from at least one of them; this support was limited to a few occasions. For example, slightly over one-third of the elderly received some money when their daughters visited them. This was the most common way married daughters helped their elderly parents. Elderly Vettuvans in Engandiyour in 1997 received help in personal care and being taken to their daughter's home for short periods.

Focus-group discussions revealed some of the reasons why married daughters had become unable to provide support. Daughters rarely visited their natal home; married women were tied up with their family and were very rarely able to visit their parents. This was particularly true when children attended school and the family was nuclear. Another factor that reduced the frequency of visits of married daughters to their natal home was the distance. In the late 1990s Vettuvans married their daughters to men who lived 20-30 kilometres away, compared to mostly walkable distances in the past. Although bus services were very frequent, Vettuvan women did not travel alone. They had to be accompanied by either their husband or children. Often such opportunities only occurred occasionally. Overall, married daughters' role in the old-age support of their parents seemed to be relatively small compared to the past.

Table 6.14: Percentage of elderly Vettuvans receiving support from married daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

% of the elderly receiving no support	% of the elderly receiving money when daughters visited them	% of the elderly occasionally taken to daughters' house	% of the elderly taken care of when sick	% of the elderly receiving medicine	% of the elderly staying with married daughter
51	37	2	2	6	2

Note: N=98 (elderly with married daughters).
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

The various kinds of support the elderly receive from their unmarried daughters is shown in Table 6.15. The role of unmarried daughters in the care of old parents seems to be limited to the physical care they provided. About three-fourths of the respondents shared this view. Elderly parents reported having received financial assistance from working daughters, who constituted about 12 per cent of the unmarried daughters. About 6 per cent of parents received care during sickness from their unmarried daughters. The remaining 9 per cent of the parents reported that they did not receive any assistance from their unmarried daughters.

Table 6.15: Percentage of elderly Vettuvans receiving support from unmarried daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

% of the elderly receiving assistance in housework	% of the elderly receiving money	% of the elderly cared for when sick	% of the elderly receiving no support
73	12	6	9

Note: N=33 (elderly with unmarried daughters).
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

To gain some idea about the quality of support the elderly received from their children, we asked them how they compared the support they provided to their own parents with the support they currently received from their children. The answers are summarised in Table 6.16. Overall, about three-fifths of the elderly parents were of the opinion that they received better support from their children than they had provided to their parents. This view was held by slightly more women than men. About one-fifth of the elderly reported that they received the same level of support as they have given their parents. Those who reported receiving poorer support from their children than they had given made up only around one-tenth of the total

number of elderly persons in the survey.

Table 6.16: Comparison of care the elderly Vettuvans received from their children with the care they provided to their parents, Engandiyour, 1997

Opinion about the care given by children	Males N (%)	Females N (%)	Total N (%)
Better than I gave to my parents	35 (62.5)	47 (72.3)	82 (67.8)
Same as I gave to my parents	15 (26.8)	10 (15.4)	25 (20.7)
Worse than I gave to my parents	6 (10.7)	8 (12.3)	14 (11.5)
Total	56 (100)	65 (100)	121 (100)

Note:[a]Includes (four men and 13 women) those without children or who did not have an elderly parent to take care of as their parents died early.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

In order to understand the nature of physical support to the elderly when they fell sick, and the economic support provided by paying bills for medical treatment, all elderly persons in the study were asked to give information on the people who provided such help when they fell sick. Table 6.17 shows various members of the family who provide this support to the elderly. The general pattern is that sons pay the bills for doctors, hospital and medicine, and daughters and daughters-in-law provide physical support. Physical assistance includes help with eating, moving around, having a bath, and the other help needed when an elderly person is sick or too old to perform such activities alone. Sons and daughters-in-law were found to be of pivotal importance in providing support to the elderly Vettuvans. The daughter's role was less significant than the son's and the daughter-in-law's in both financial and physical support to elderly parents.

Table 6.17: Distribution of providers of care to the elderly Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Relationship	Take care of while sick N (%)	Pay bills for medicine/doctor N (%)
Son	20 (14.9)	100 (78.1)
Daughter	30 (22.4)	13 (10.1)
Wife/husband	18 (13.4)	2 (1.6)
Daughter-in-law	34 (25.5)	--
Grand children	8 (5.9)	2 (1.6)
Other family members	24 (17.9)	11 (8.6)
Total	134 (100)	128 (100)

Note: 14 elderly people who did not require medical treatment excluded from the analysis.
Source: Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997.

6.5 Education: the strategy for social and economic mobility

Education is seen by everyone in the Vettuvan community as a key element in social and economic mobility. In order to understand the educational aspirations of the Vettuvans a question was asked of parents about the level to which they would educate their children. Responses are given in Table 6.18. About 55 per cent of the respondents want their children to study to as high a level as they can reach. About one-fifth of the respondents would educate their children as long as they could afford to do so. About 17 per cent of the parents wanted to educate their children at least up to matriculation. It was not only essential to pass at each level of education, but also to obtain higher marks to receive admission. Interviews with Vettuvan parents revealed that even with the concession for scheduled castes in educational institutions, it was hard to obtain admission to courses of choice. Therefore, parental desires alone would not enable parents to have their aspirations fulfilled; the performance children in studies was also important.

Table 6.18: Vettuvan parents' aspirations regarding the education of their children, Engandiyour, 1997

Educational aspirations	Boys N (%)	Girls N (%)	Total N (%)
As long as they can study	84 (60.0)	58 (50.9)	142 (55.9)
As long as we can afford it	20 (14.3)	31 (27.2)	51 (20.1)
At least up to matriculation	24 (17.1)	18 15.8)	42 (16.5)
Others	12 (8.6)	7 (6.1)	19 (7.5)
Others	140 (100.0)	114 (100.0)	254 (100.0)

Source: Survey of School-Going Children, 1997.

What were the parents' motivations in educating their children? Interviews with Vettuvan parents revealed that when the caste-system-based social and economic relationships disappeared with the land reforms, they felt a great deal of independence. The non-Vettuvans of the village demonstrated that education was a prerequisite for well-paid employment in order to become economically and socially better off. It was accepted among the Vettuvans that educated families were socially and economically better off than non-educated families. When the caste system changed, individual qualities became important yardsticks in the social and economic scaling; education was the most important factor.

In 1997 educating a Vettuvan child in Engandiyour involved at least the following: sending the child to the best available school; providing the child with all necessary books and other equipment needed at school; providing the child with good-quality clothing while going to school; giving the child ample opportunity to play after school; helping the child to complete homework assignments. Education was, therefore, not simply a matter of sending a child to school, as it was two decades ago in Engandiyour.

The following are the implications of these changes in education. First, the best available school need not be the nearest one. If the nearest school was not a good[33] school, parents sent their children to a good school; this often required transport. Sending a child to a school which was not within walking distance from home meant that parents had to spend money on transport and pack lunch every morning before the child left home; and if the child was attending a kindergarten or primary school, the parent or someone else needed to accompany the child to the school. Secondly, parents were expected to buy the necessary books and other educational accessories recommended by the school: there was social pressure on parents to obtain those items for children on time. Third, all the schools in the village, private and public, had a system of uniforms for children to wear on school days. It was important for parents not only to provide such uniforms, but also to provide good-quality ones; this forced parents to buy new clothes before school began. Fourth, once children returned from school, they were supposed to be playing or studying, and not working. From among 254 school children surveyed in the study about half were doing some work at home. For girls, this included helping their mother clean the house and courtyard, fetching water, and cleaning utensils. For boys, the work included going to the shop and caring for animals. However, this work of boys and girls did not involve more than one hour a day. None of the children ever worked for wages. Thus, the economic contribution of school-going children to the family was limited. Finally, parents were supposed to supervise any homework given by the school. Parents had to help the child or engage a private tutor to help the child to do homework. To meet the educational needs of children discussed above it was certainly easier and sometimes only possible with few children.

Why did the Vettuvans educate their children? Answers given by the Vettuvan parents to this question are given in Table 6.19. About nine-tenths of parents reported that the main reason for educating their children was to enable them to obtain good jobs so as to improve the social and economic status of the family. For the Vettuvans education was a mobility strategy for achieving social status in the village. An educated Vettuvan could command a much higher status from non-Vettuvans compared to an uneducated Vettuvan. Therefore, the role of education was first viewed as something that brought status; the economic benefit was only of secondary importance. It is important to note that only about one-third of the parents said that they were educating their children to obtain a job. About a quarter of the

[33]The quality of a school is judged by the number of students who pass the 10th year examinations in the case of high schools. In other schools, quality of teaching is judged on the basis of opinion prevailing in the village.

parents reported that they were educating their children because they wanted to see their children 'educated', so that they could read, write, and go anywhere without assistance, fill out application forms (for various purposes), and most importantly, they would not be ridiculed or cheated by anyone, particularly the upper castes. In sum, education was the pathway to full participation in society.

Table 6.19: Distribution of Vettuvan parents' reasons for educating their children, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons	Boys N (%)[a]	Girls N (%)[a]	Total N (%)[a]
To obtain a job	39 (27.8)	45 (39.5)	84 (33.1)
To enable family to increase economic and social status	111 (79.3)	108 (94.7)	229 (90.2)
To see that children were educated	35 (25.0)	24 (21.1)	59 (23.2)
Total	140	114	254

Notes: [a]Percentages exceed 100 because of multiple responses.
Source: School-Going Children Survey, 1997.

6.6 Occupational aspirations of Vettuvans

To find out about occupational aspirations of parents regarding their children, a question was asked about what occupation parents would like their children to have in the future. Responses are given in Table 6.20. About half of the respondents wanted their children to be in a non-labouring occupation. The most common desire among the Vettuvans was that they did not want their children to be labourers like themselves or their parents. What was learned through the interviews about Vettuvans' attitudes regarding labouring was that they considered it to have a close relation to their lower-caste status. Individuals were respected and treated differently according to what profession or occupation they were in. A labourer occupied the lowest position in the occupational structure, even if he or she earned better wages than a white-collar worker. The most desirable occupation among the Vettuvans was that of *udyogasthan,* an office-worker who used pen and paper. Slightly over a quarter of the respondents indicated that they wanted their children to become government servants and about half wanted their children in any non-labouring

occupation. Some respondents (13 per cent) specified a profession such as teaching, medicine or engineering, or employment as a technician or a policeman.

Table 6.20: Occupational aspirations about children, Vettuvans, Engandiyour, 1997

Professional aspiration	Boys N (%)	Girls N (%)	Total N (%)
Government job	42 (30.0)	30 (26.3)	72 (28.3)
Non-labouring job, but what exactly depends on their education and opportunities	68 (48.6)	54 (47.4)	122 (48.0)
Other (Good job, bank, police, doctor, teacher, should work)	20 (14.3)	13 (11.4)	33 (13.0)
No answer/respondent was not parent	10 (7.1)	17 (14.9)	27 (10.6)
Total	140 (100.0)	114 (100.0)	254 (100.0)

Source: Survey of School-Going Children, 1997.

When asked why they wanted their children to have the occupation they indicated, the majority of parents responded that they wanted social and economic progress in the family through such occupation. Economic progress through good education and occupation is the most preferred way of mobility among the Vettuvans.

6.7 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter has shown that caste-system changes, land reform, and Gulf migration have modified the family system, indirectly influencing the sex roles, old-age support system, and marriage practices. The family, thus, has been the unit organising and executing the needed changes for the social and economic enhancement of the Vettuvans.

Crucially, the caste-system changes have made it possible for the Vettuvans to progress socially and economically. The educational aspiration of the Vettuvans is to provide the maximum education they can to their children, depending on the ability of the child. In any case the lower limit is to provide matriculation-level education, the minimum educational qualification required for a government job. The Vettuvans have also shown a change in their occupation, from labourers attached to one family to construction workers or skilled and semi-skilled occupations. As with education, these changes were made possible by land reform and Gulf migration. While the Vettuvans want a salaried government career for their children, they did not object to any job other than labouring. 'We do not want our child to be a labourer', 'We do not want our children and grandchildren to suffer like us'. Such comments form the background to all family and childbearing decisions. Chapter 7 investigates how such aspirations affect parental demand for children.

The family also remains a key institution in providing support for the elderly. In this regard, the role of sons remains vital, given the patrilocal residence pattern. However, all family aspirations need to be seen in the context of the overwhelming desire for social mobility: to escape the legacy of the Vettuvans' low position in the traditional caste hierarchy.

Chapter 7

Fertility as Mobility: Security-Mobility Costs and Benefits of Children Among the Vettuvans

7.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 discussed the role of the Vettuvan family as a social and economic security and mobility unit. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the security and mobility benefits[1] and costs[2] of children as viewed by husbands and wives for their own as well as their children's security and mobility. For example, how many children, and of what sex, would enable parents to achieve their security and mobility goals, in the changed institutional environment? Old-age security is often seen as one of the most important aspects of the value of children, particularly sons in less developed countries. This chapter will also focus especially on the old-age security value of Vettuvan male and female children in Engandiyour. Given the very different roles played by sons and daughters, there is little point in considering the 'value of children' without reference to their sex. Thus this chapter examines the security and mobility costs and benefits of sons and daughters separately. The ultimate objective of the chapter is to demonstrate how security and mobility benefits and costs of sons and daughters reported by Vettuvan wives and husbands are linked with their fertility levels and fertility preferences examined in Chapter 4.

7.2 Sons: the nature of security and mobility costs and benefits

In the present study nearly all Vettuvan husbands (98 per cent) and wives (99 per cent) in Engandiyour felt that it was necessary for a couple to have at least one son.

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[1]Benefits and advantages are interchangeably used in this chapter.
[2]Costs and disadvantages are interchangely used in this chapter.

This information is a clear indication that, as in many other communities in India and similar cultures[3], sons were highly valued among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour. Why were sons essential to a Vettuvan couple? What characteristics of the Vettuvans contributed to this felt necessity? These issues are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Table 7.1 shows views of Vettuvan wives and husbands on why at least one son was essential to a Vettuvan couple. The major reason that emerged was old-age support. Slightly more than half the wives and slightly less than half the husbands shared this view. The concept of old age is relative and situation-specific. Among the Vettuvans, old age was the end of physical ability to work[4], and becoming a widow (at roughly 50 or over) in the case of women. There was no clear age-specificity attached to 'old age'. Evidence shows that widowhood among the Vettuvans was very high[5], suggesting a greater demand for their care. Since the majority of Vettuvans were still employed in daily-wage-earning occupations, their inability to work would change their status to that of a dependant[6]. This means that a sizeable proportion of men and women aged 60 years and above among the Vettuvans needed assistance from others. Thus, the magnitude of the old-age situation influenced by demographic, social and economic factors seems to have some relation to the reported importance of sons as an old age security asset. It has been demonstrated in Chapter 6 that most of the elderly received the support they needed from their children, particularly sons.

Among the Vettuvans, old-age support incorporated both social and economic support. The economic aspect is that sons supported parents by providing basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter and medical care. The social meaning is that sons provided a 'security and status symbol' which enabled parents to receive higher status in their old age, both in the family and village circles. However, educated and employed (in non-traditional occupations) sons provide better status to their parents than do less educated and unemployed (or employed in traditional occupations) sons. The economic and social components of old age were not two

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[3]For example, Vlassoff's (1979) study carried out in Maharashtra state in India stressed the importance of culture-related values for desiring sons. Cain (1977, 1981, 1983, 1986) in a series of publications, on the other hand, argued the economic value of sons in societies in Bangladesh, where elaborate alternatives for old-age support are lacking. Also see Mamdani (1972) in Manupur, and Nag *et al.* (1978) in a Javanese and a Nepalese village with similar values for sons.

[4]Vlassoff and Vlassoff (1980:498) showed from their Maharashtra study that old age beyond the productive period was not the normally expected outcome. See also Vlassoff (1990).

[5]Nearly half of the women aged 50 years and above were widows. For more details, see Chapter 6.

[6]No adequate savings were reported among the Vettuvans. A nominal old age pension (Rs. 61 per month) is reported to be inadequate to meet their various needs.

distinctive aspects for the Vettuvans. The usage *vayasakumbol nokkan*, to care in old age, is an omnibus term; it can incorporate everything that can make an old person feel that he or she has been taken care of, according to the given social and economic situation of the family.

The caste-system changes and land reform have contributed to the importance of family in the support for the elderly among the Vettuvans. As seen in Chapter 6, the breakdown of the traditional landlord-tenant relationship significantly increased the role of the Vettuvan family in the care of its family members, particularly the elderly. Under the traditional landlord-tenant arrangement, the Vettuvans had very little option in caring for aged parents or other needy people in the family. Everything was pre-determined. All family members had to contribute to the landlord's work until the last day of their life. Neither children nor the elderly were exempted from work. When tenancy was abolished and the Vettuvans became independent from the caste-system bondage, the role of the family in caring for its older members became a norm. There was a greater pressure not to let parents continue working if their health was poor and to provide parents with medical care, along with other necessities. There were sons in the Vettuvan community who demanded the withdrawal from labouring of their mothers who were 60 years of age, even when the mothers were healthy. In the absence of a non-familial dependable system for the care of the elderly population for the Vettuvans in Engandiyour, it was likely that Vettuvans would regard their sons as potential carers[7] in the old age.

The second important reason for the necessity to have sons was related to the economic support that children provided to their parents and family (Table 7.1). In contrast with old age support, which is normally associated with the non-productive years (older and sick) of parents, the economic support to the family is the support that parents might receive during their productive years. Slightly less than one-third of wives and slightly more than one-third of husbands considered that having a son was important for economic reasons. Considering the widely held view[8] that

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[7]A similar argument was advanced by Cain (1983): 'where financial and insurance markets are poorly developed, and where, consistent with the joint household formation system, there is no tradition of extrafamilial welfare institutions, children have a number of desirable properties as security assets. Most importantly, with respect to security for elderly parents, they fulfil the need for an annuity' (Cain, 1983:694).

[8]Nag *et al.* (1978:301) demonstrated from their study in Javanese and Nepalese villages that the work output of children to their families was quite substantial. DeTray's (1983:452-453) study based on the 1976 Malaysian Family Life Survey concludes that both male and female children make productive contributions to their families. See also Cain (1977) for a similar finding from Bangladesh. However, Muller (1976) using aggregate and life-cycle models showed that children

children, particularly sons, are economic assets in poor economic settings[9], this percentage may appear small. This implies that changes have taken place in the village that could have influenced the economic value of children among the Vettuvans. Important changes that have taken place in the village in this regard were in the areas of education and occupation. Chapter 5 showed that the education of the Vettuvans has increased significantly in the 1990s; and it documented a significant shift in the occupation of the Vettuvans from traditional to non-traditional areas. Both education and modern occupations can delay entry into work. These changes not only delay but also lessen the contributions of sons to the family economy, in Caldwell's (1982) terms reducing wealth-flow from children to parents. The other reason for the small percentage of husbands and wives considering sons as economic assets may be because children in the traditional caste system may not be significant contributors to their family economy. In-depth interviews revealed that the caste system compelled the Vettuvan children to work[10] long hours as early as 10-12 years[11]. Under the caste system the beneficiaries of child labour were the landlords. That means in the traditional caste system, those who produced children and those who benefited from children were two different sets of people, the tenant Vettuvans and the landlords, respectively. Again according to Caldwell's (1982) term, the wealth-flow from sons to parents or family was not significant. Therefore, both in the traditional caste system and the non-traditional caste system, younger Vettuvan children in Engandiyour were probably not economically beneficial to their parents during their productive ages. It is reasonable, therefore, to speculate that the economic contributions of younger children to their family economy had been less substantial among the Vettuvans[12]. The fact that in 1997 about a third of the couples still expected economic support from children indicates that the Vettuvan community had not fully transformed to an economy where the flow of economic support is overwhelmingly from parents to children.

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have negative value in peasant communities; in peasant societies children—from birth to the time of their own marriage—tend to produce less than they consume.

[9]It may be recalled here that Vettuvans were one of the poorest sections of Engandiyour village.

[10]This work included carrying food to the fields, caring for animals, collecting coconuts and generally helping parents in their work.

[11]Dyson (1991)argues that children work because people have children, rather than people producing children in order to make them work. See Vlassoff (1991) for a similar view.

[12]It is important to understand the social and economic context of the caste system to explain this situation. An increase in the labour force in the family only contributed more wealth to the landlord. The share the tenants received was not fully based on how much they produced, rather on how many members were in the family. Thus, the addition of labour increased the agricultural output of the landowner, but not necessarily the tenant family's. See Muller (1976) for an analysis of negative economic value of children in peasant societies.

The third reason suggested by the respondents for feeling that sons were essential to a couple was the socio-cultural dimension related to the preservation of the family name and traditions. This was reported by about one-third of wives and a slightly lower proportion of husbands (Table 7.1). It may be noted that the Vettuvans followed the patrilineal kinship pattern. In societies where kinship is traced along the lines of males, the importance of having at least one son is found to be higher than in matrilineal societies, for reasons related to keeping the family name and traditions (Kapadia, 1966:182). Among the Vettuvans, if a couple did not have a son, normally one of their married daughters would continue to live in her parents' house: the parents would adopt the son-in-law as a son. After the death of the father, the family name would be changed to the daughter's husband's family name. In this process, *veetuperu*, the family name would be changed forever. In other words, the lineage lost a member family. This was something that no Vettuvans would like to happen to them. Vettuvans were deeply concerned about the *tharawad nashikkal*, 'the peril of the family'. They expressed the view that their family *karanavanmar,* or 'ancestors', would be unhappy because the new authority might not perform *veeduvekkal*, 'offerings to ancestors and family deities'. Vettuvans, like other lower-caste Hindus in the village, offered special food, normally a dish prepared from a rooster raised locally, and toddy to their ancestors, believing that such actions would keep their souls happy. There was a widely held belief among the Vettuvans that if ancestors were unhappy, that could cause disease, mishaps, delays in accomplishing tasks, and other misfortunes. It was also the worry of the Vettuvans that the son-in-law (new authority) might sell off the property in order to settle in his own locality[13], maybe in another village. The concern about selling off the house was related to the emotional bond Vettuvans had with the land on which they had lived for generations. Their grandparents, and other relatives, and in some cases even their parents, were all buried in the compound of their house[14]. This, however, was not the case for those households that had recently moved to a new location. The economic value of sons and culture-related importance of sons seemed to have almost equal importance among the Vettuvans.

The physical-security value of sons was reported by about one-fifth of wives and one-sixth of husbands (Table 7.1). Observation and informal interviews with Vettuvans in Engandiyour indicated that people believed that, if there were men in

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[13]There would be less recognition of a couple, particularly the husband, if they decided to live in the house of the wife. Villagers considered the husband an outsider. It might take several years before he was fully accepted in the village. Acceptance means being invited to social functions, talking freely, and so on.

[14]Vettuvans buried their dead in their own housing compound.

the family, they would not be subjected to improper behaviour or other such actions by anyone. However, there was no evidence in the village that people behaved improperly to those Vettuvan families without a son. Studies conducted elsewhere in India, however, demonstrated the importance of sons for physical security (Mamdani, 1972).

In this survey only one-tenth of wives and slightly fewer husbands held the view that a son was essential to carry out the last rites for his parents. Sons played an important role in the last rites of parents in the past; among the Vettuvans only males could perform these rites. While one's own daughters were not permitted to perform the last rites, close or even distant male relatives could do so. Couples who did not have a son usually established good relations with the husband's brother's sons or those males who had the potential to perform the last rites for them. It was considered a disgrace for the deceased to have an 'enemy' (or their enemy's son) performing the last rites. To have a son to perform the last rites was thus important for a couple. However, because sons were often in other states and countries at the time of death, the traditional view of Hindus in Engandiyour that sons were the preferred ones who could perform such rites was being relaxed. This seemed to have influenced Vettuvan attitudes regarding the role of sons in performing last rites for parents, although few members from the Vettuvan community work in other states or countries.

Table 7.1: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion about the necessity of sons for a Vettuvan couple, Engandiyour, 1997

Opinion about the necessity of sons	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
To support parents in old age	159 (52.6)	131 (49.1)	290 (51.0)
To support family economically	90 (29.7)	94 (35.2)	184 (32.3)
To keep family name and traditions	98 (32.4)	77 (28.8)	175 (30.8)
Physical protection of the family	58 (19.2)	43 (16.1)	101 (17.8)
To perform last rites for parents	30 (10.0)	19 (7.1)	49 (8.6)
Others[a]	23 (7.6)	33 (12.3)	56 (9.8)
Number of respondents	302	267	569

Notes: Those who indicated that sons were not essential to a couple or who were indifferent were excluded from this analysis. There were six wives and two husbands in these categories.
[a]Others include: 'Sons remain at home after marriage'; 'To perform work which women do not'; and 'To look after mother when father dies'.
[b]Total percentages exceed 100 because of multiple responses
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

The above discussion shows that a son was essential to a Vettuvan couple in Engandiyour in 1997. The old-age security aspect emerged as the most significant reason to have at least one son. A wide range of socio-economic aspects surrounded the perceived necessity for a son. The necessities could be considered as security- and mobility-related benefits to parents and family from having at least one son. One pertinent question arises at this point: if at least one son is important to a Vettuvan couple, why did such a view not translate to their fertility outcomes? As revealed in Table 4.18, about 10 per cent of the 192 wives in the Vettuvan study did not have a son and had undergone sterilisation. More significantly, demand for many sons seems to be lacking in this community, although at least one son is reported to be essential. Before addressing this apparent paradox between wanted and achieved, various aspects of having one son are discussed.

7.2.1 Benefits to parents and family from having only one son

Although the demographic literature on the value of sons to parents generally ignores the number of sons a couple has, there may be reasons why parents might not want several sons, even if the need for one son is strongly expressed. Thus it is useful to consider the value of having one son, and then the value of having two or more. For example, if there is a markedly different value in having one son and two or more sons, it almost pointless to discuss the value of sons without referring to their number.

All the Vettuvan wives and the husbands in the present study were asked their views about the benefits parents and families would receive from having only one son in the social and economic situation prevailing in Engandiyour in 1997. This question was administered irrespective of the number and sex of children each respondent had. The results are given in Table 7.2. For slightly over two-fifths of Vettuvan wives and husbands, an important benefit to parents from having one son was that parents would be easily able to meet the son's various needs. Two inferences can be made from this observation. First, with one son it would be easy to provide care comparable to that provided by other communities to their children. This includes sending children to good schools, and providing them with good food, clothes and other necessities. Secondly, in the social and economic environment that prevailed in 1997 in Engandiyour, an educated person would have higher social and economic status than a less educated person. Thus, by having one son parents could improve the economic opportunities for their children and increase their children's as well as their own social status, a 'win-win' situation, where both parents and children would benefit. This observation is consistent with the study of Vlassoff and Vlassoff (1980:499) in a Maharashtra village where they noted that parents were not selfish in having only one son for their benefit. However, Bulatao (1980:101), using data from 23 countries, argues that parents' aspirations for their own lives were a more plausible explanation for fertility decline than parents' aspirations for their children. There was a widespread belief in Engandiyour that if a couple had only one son, parents could give him their full 'attention'. Once again, this indicates the desire of parents to provide for their children's welfare and progress. The general feeling among the Vettuvan parents we interviewed was that there was a limit to what they could do to ensure the economic and social welfare of their families. They believed that it was their children who could further change the social and economic position of the family by better education and employment. This is somewhat a different situation from other studies where sons were seen as mostly useful for the

immediate day-to-day needs of the family (Cain, 1977), rather than a long-term mobility investment. The implication of this for their fertility is that the Vettuvans would limit the number of sons to a minimum for whom they can provide all needed care[15]. In the circumstances in Engandiyour and Kerala where the cost of living was high, education of children was valued highly, and non-traditional occupations were preferred to traditional ones, the poor Vettuvans had no other option than to have only son to meet their aspirations to climb the social and economic ladder. For Vettuvans, these aspirations were a result of caste-system changes and abolition of tenancy.

Slightly more than a quarter of wives and about one-fifth of husbands reported that disputes over land could be avoided if a Vettuvan couple had only one son. In 1997, as indicated in Chapter 6, among the Vettuvans, land was the main source of dispute between relatives, and of family division. In families where there was only one son the land was not supposed to be shared, as land was not shared with sisters[16]. Thus, having only one son ensured no dispute over property between brothers. There were examples in my interviews among the Vettuvans of very peaceful transfer of parental property to the only son. Such transfers demonstrated that land-related disputes could be minimised if a couple had only one son. The land reform which provided fixity of land to the Vettuvans resulted, indirectly, in no further avenues for land for tenancy from the landlords. Given the land prices and poor economic conditions of the Vettuvans, it was then inevitable to share the land given to them through land reform between brothers. Having only son can, thus, avoid disputes that may arise from the division of a very small piece of land. The role of land reform in raising the value of having only one son is reflected in the view presented in this paragraph and the fertility data presented in Chapter 4.

Slightly fewer than one-fifth of wives and about one-seventh husbands reported that having only one son would ensure support in parents' old age. These respondents believed that when a couple has one son, there would be no opportunity for the son to share the responsibility of caring for parents with brothers, which may result in neither caring for the parents. A situation where there is only one son normally results in the only son providing all the support to parents.

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[15]Bhattacharyya and Hayes (19??) showed from rural Bangladesh that the socio-economic development in rural areas first increase perception of parents of the long-term benefits from sending children to schools. However, when the cost of sending children becomes economic burden, parents would reduce their fertility. That means parents will have only fewer children to whom they can provide education easily.

[16]Dowry given at the time of a girl's marriage was considered to be the daughter's share in the property of parents.

To sum up, in the social and economic situation prevailing in Engandiyour in 1997, there were several security and mobility benefits in having only one son. These benefits were generated primarily by the effects of caste-system changes, land reform and Gulf migration. It appears that these benefits of having only one son have resulted in their fertility outcomes and norms about fertility discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 7.2: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the benefits to parents and family of parents having only one son, Engandiyour, 1997

Benefit of having one son	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
No benefit	14 (4.5)	19 (7.1)	33 (5.7)
Parents can meet children's needs	140 (45.5)	113 (42.0)	253 (43.9)
Less dispute over property	91 (29.5)	52 (19.3)	143 (24.8)
Will look after parents	59 (19.2)	41 (15.2)	100 (17.3)
Cost and benefit the same	47 (15.3)	49 (18.2)	96 (16.6)
Others[a]	17 (5.5)	36 (13.4)	53 (9.2)
Number of respondents	308	269	577

Note: [a]Others include: 'more affection towards parents'; 'there is benefit'; 'less responsibility to parents'; and 'peace of mind'. [b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.2.2 Disadvantages to parents and family of having only one son

Having examined the various security-mobility benefits from having only one son, this section considers the security-mobility costs, or disadvantages to parents and family. Table 7.3 portrays the costs to parents and family of having only one son reported by Vettuvan wives and husbands. According to the table nearly three-

quarters of wives and slightly more husbands reported that there were no security-mobility disadvantages to parents and family from having only one son. That means, having only son would not negatively influence the security-mobility efforts of the Vettuvans.

The only significant concern expressed by the respondents was the disadvantage to parents if the only son became disloyal to the family or died. This concern was reported by slightly less than a quarter of the wives and one-fifth of husbands. Other types of costs reported by less than five per cent of the wives and husbands were 'lower strength to the family', 'lower income to the family', and 'more responsibility to the son'.

Table 7.3: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the costs to parents and family of parents having only one son, Engandiyour, 1997

Disadvantages of having only one son	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
None	228 (74.0)	211 (78.4)	439 (76.1)
If they become useless or die, it is a heavy loss to family	73 (23.7)	55 (20.5)	128 (22.2)
Others[a]	17 (5.5)	9 (3.3)	26 (4.5)
Number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes:[a]Others include: 'lower strength to family'; 'if separated', 'more problem to parents'; 'lower income to family'; and 'more responsibility to sons'. [b]Total percentages exceed 100 because of multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

To sum up, a comparison of the benefits and costs or disadvantages to parents and family from having only one son, as viewed by the Vettuvan wives and husbands in Engandiyour, suggests that the benefits outweighed the costs. When asked about the benefit of having one son to parents and family only about 5 per cent of respondents indicated no benefit; on the contrary, nearly three-quarters reported no cost to parents and family when asked about the cost of having only son. The benefits of having only one son are not only the benefits that children bring to parents or to the

family, but also that this makes it possible for parents to provide the care that matches the prevailing norms in the society. Ultimately, one well educated and employed son will bring more social and economic status and support to parents and family than several uneducated and unemployed sons.

7.2.3 Benefits to parents and family from having two or more sons

This section discusses the views of Vettuvan wives and husbands about the benefits parents and family would receive from having two or more sons. As will be seen, although having one son is seen as essential, attitudes to having more are ambiguous. As Table 7.4. reveals, slightly less than one-third of both wives and husbands reported that there was no benefit to the parents or their family from having two or more sons. The rest indicated various benefits, but many of the benefits they proposed were conditional. For example, about two-fifths of the wives and nearly half the husbands held the view that if all the sons of a couple were in suitable employment, then it might be beneficial for parents. Similarly, a few respondents indicated that two or more sons would be beneficial to parents only if they possessed good character. What they indirectly indicated, perhaps, was that in the situation of 1997 (in Engandiyour and Kerala) having two or more sons was unlikely to bring any worthwhile benefit to their parents because of the potential difficulty in finding employment for sons in non-traditional sectors, and the increasing chances of sons becoming disloyal to parents. There was a great fear in the village in general and among the Vettuvans in particular that more and more young men would be trapped in the habit of alcohol consumption and spending money on gambling. Thus, nearly four-fifths of the respondents held the view that two or more sons would entail either no benefit or conditional benefit in the social and economic setting that prevailed.

A benefit of having two or more sons was the possibility that at least one son would look after his parents in their old age. This was reported by about a quarter of the wives and husbands. A similar finding was reported by Hull (1977:244) in Java: 'many people also verbalise the notion that it is better to have many offspring in order to ensure that they will have children about them as they approach old age'. A very small proportion, less than five per cent of both wives and husbands, reported that if they had two or more sons, parents could have less responsibility for meeting day-to-day expenses in running the family once their children grew up. The very low percentage suggesting this view is probably an indication of the growing concern among parents about the limited returns from sons, particularly during the

parents' productive years.

Physical protection for the family was reported by about three per cent of both wives and husbands as a benefit of having two or more sons. In comparison, about one-fifth of the wives and husbands reported that sons would provide physical security for the family when we asked them about the reasons for feeling the necessity of having sons (see Table 7.1). Thus, it appears that the greater number of sons was not the key factor that provided physical protection to the family, but their quality: education and employment[17]. That is in the context prevailing in 1997, one educated son employed in the non-traditional sector was enough to provide physical security to the family. Physical protection in Engandiyour was no longer a matter of physical defence, it was more related to the ability of the family to use legal means should anyone physically assault the family or the property.

Each of the 'other reasons' was reported by less than one per cent of the wives and husbands. The proposition that more sons means more status seems to be very weak for the Vettuvans: only about one per cent of the couples indicated that more sons would bring higher status to the family[18]. Among the Vettuvans if sons were unemployed and uneducated they could not bring status to the family and parents. On the contrary, it was shameful for the family to have grown-up male children without work. Another reason that emerged among the benefits of having two or more sons was related to the ability of the family to make a good marriage alliance for their daughters. Yet another set of benefits reported was that parents could stay with either son. Few of the wives and husbands indicating the benefits reported in the 'other reasons' make reference to any unique conditions of the Vettuvans.

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[17]This is in clear contrast to what Mamdani found in a Punjabi village.

[18]Studies conducted elsewhere in India sometimes demonstrated the correlation of status of family with number of sons: more sons, more status (Mamdani, 1972).

Table 7.4: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the benefits to parents and family of parents having two or more sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Benefits from two or more sons	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
No benefit	87 (28.2)	80 (29.7)	167 (28.9)
If all sons work, then there is benefit	123 (39.9)	137 (51.0)	260 (45.1)
At least one will look after parents in old age	81 (26.3)	72 (26.8)	153 (26.5)
If all have good character, it makes no difference	15 (4.9)	17 (6.3)	32 (5.5)
There will be less economic responsibility for parents	11 (3.6)	10 (3.7)	21 (3.6)
Each brother can share family responsibility	6 (2.0)	2 (0.7)	8 (1.4)
More physical strength to the family	11 (3.6)	8 (3.0)	19 (3.3)
Others[a]	10 (3.2)	6 (2.2)	16 (2.8)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes: [a]Others include: 'more relations through marriage will emerge'; 'status to the family'; 'daughters can be married to good families'; and 'parents can stay with each child'. [b]Total percentages exceed 100 due to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.2.4 Disadvantages of having two or more sons

Views of Vettuvan wives and husbands on the cost of having two or more sons to their parents and family are depicted in Table 7.5. The most important disadvantage revealed by the wives and husbands in the study was the possibility of disputes over land among the brothers. More than half of the respondents reported this issue. As we have seen in Chapter 5, the majority of Vettuvans held less than five cents (0.02 hectares) of land obtained through the land reform. It would be practically impossible to accommodate more than one house on such a small piece of land. The rise in land prices prevented Vettuvans from buying land for constructing houses.

The growing attitude towards educating and providing for children with all possible facilities has led, and is likely to continue to lead, many Vettuvans to have separate households. It would be hard to avoid land-related conflict, should parents have a large number of sons. Under such circumstances there are few incentives to parents to have more than one son. In fact one of the important benefits of having only one son was to reduce land-related disputes. A comparison of the benefit from having only one son and the cost of having two or more sons confirms the view of Vettuvan wives and husbands in Engandiyour that land-related disputes can be avoided if Vettuvan parents limit their number of sons to one.

Slightly less than one-third of both wives and husbands reported that if there were more sons it would be difficult to control them, and the sons would end up drinking and gambling. Parents would eventually lose their peace of mind. It was also possible that some sons would create problems outside the family and parents would have to face the consequences. About 6 per cent of wives and husbands reported that if they had more sons it was unlikely that any son would take on the responsibility for parents. That is, each one would think that it was the responsibility of the other to look after the parents. Economic difficulty in bringing up children as a cost was reported by about 4 per cent of wives and 6 per cent of the husbands. A few wives and husbands reported that lack of co-operation among brothers might be a cost of having two or more sons. Those 'other reasons' included 'none will help in old age'; and 'if no job for children, higher responsibility to parents'.

In sum, taking together the benefits of having only one son and the costs of having two or more sons confirms the attitude of the Vettuvan wives and husbands that they prefer one son.

Table 7.5: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the costs to parents and family of parents having two or more sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Disadvantages of two or more sons	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
None	58 (18.8)	38 (14.1)	96 (16.6)
Dispute over property	176 (57.1)	163 (60.6)	339 (58.8)
Difficult to control	85 (27.6)	78 (29.1)	163 (28.2)
Economic difficulty to bring them up	12 (3.9)	16 (6.0)	28 (4.9)
May not look after parents	18 (5.9)	16 (6.0)	34 (5.9)
Less co-operative	8 (2.6)	14 (5.2)	22 (3.8)
Others[a]	8 (2.6)	13 (4.8)	21 (3.6)
Number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes: [a]Others include: 'if poor, there is a problem'; 'if no jobs for children', 'higher responsibility to parents'; 'none will help in old age'; 'after marriage sons will have less relation with parents'.
[b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

A comparison of the two sets of responses, costs and benefits to parents of having one son with costs and benefits of having two or more sons, clearly suggests that couples in general do not favour the idea of having two or more sons. As evident from Table 7.6, about 94 per cent of respondents (wives and husbands) considered there were benefits in having only one son, whereas only about 20 per cent of the respondents (wives and husbands) reported benefits from two or more sons. The disadvantages of having only one son were reported by slightly less than a quarter of respondents (wives and husbands) compared to more than three-quarters in the case of disadvantages associated with two or more sons.

Table 7.6: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan respondents according to their opinion on the benefits and costs to parents and family of parents having one son, and two or more sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Benefits/Costs	1 son	2 or more sons
Benefits to parents and family	94.3[b]	20.5[a,d]
Costs to parents and family	23.9[c]	83.4[e]

Notes: [a]This considers conditional benefits such as 'if all sons work, then there is benefit' and 'if all have good character, then there is benefit' as not benefits of two or more sons.
Sources: Tables 7.2[b], 7.3[c], 7.4[d]and 7.5[e].

7.3 Daughters: the nature of security and mobility costs and benefits

It was noted at the beginning of this chapter that Vettuvan wives and husbands in Engandiyour felt that daughters were of equal importance with sons. The reasons for the importance of daughters differed from those attributed to sons, and mostly related to providing physical support. The most prominent reason, reported by over four-fifths of the wives and husbands in the study, was that they helped their mothers in household work. As noted in the previous chapter, among the Vettuvans household work was strictly performed by women, so a helping hand was considered highly useful. For example, when a mother was working for wages or sick, the family could depend on daughters for cooking and other household work. These benefits of daughters were limited to the period before their marriage. The role of daughters among the Vettuvans is, therefore, significant when they are unmarried and living with parents.

The role of daughters in caring for aged parents was another reason pointed out by slightly over a quarter of the wives and husbands. When parents reach old age, usually their daughters are married. The old-age support from a daughter, therefore, refers to the support parents get from a married daughter. Usually, non-monetary support is provided by daughters when parents are sick or bedridden. Traditionally, among the Vettuvans it is the responsibility of daughters to look after their parents, even if they are married or live far away from them. Interviews with Vettuvans revealed that married daughters would have to return to their natal home to care for

parents when summoned by their brother or parents. For example, if parents were in hospital it was the daughter who would normally stay with them and look after their non-monetary needs. But we have seen in Chapter 6 that the circumstances do not often permit daughters to perform their traditional role as carers of parents in Engandiyour in the 1990s.

The role of daughters in making a prosperous home was mentioned by one-fifth of the respondents. This role is largely confined to the time when the daughters are unmarried and living with parents, because once they are married they will be living with their husbands in their houses. The role of daughters in a prosperous home has its roots in tradition. Among Hindus, it is women who light *vilaku,* the lamp, in the evenings. This symbolises women providing 'light' to their families by receiving 'light' from the Sun God in the evening. A home without a daughter is thus considered less prosperous. In general, women are considered essential to a family for their distinctive roles as daughters and home-makers. While the demographic and social changes in Engandiyour were making it difficult to continue the past role of daughters, changes in the traditional roles of women among the Vettuvans were yet to be seen on a large scale.

To sum up, the necessity for a Vettuvan couple to have a daughter as indicated by wives and husbands in this study is largely as an assistant to the mother in carrying out household work. Since daughters live with their husbands in their houses after their marriage, the assistance that mothers receive from their daughters is limited to the time they remained unmarred. The role of daughters after their marriage is limited as indicated by relatively low percentages of wives and husbands expecting old-age support from daughters.

Table 7.7: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion about the necessity of a daughter for a Vettuvan couple, Engandiyour, 1997

Opinion about the necessity of daughters	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
To help mother in household work	268 (89.0)	213 (83.2)	481 (86.4)
To look after parents in old age and sickness	106 (35.2)	66 (25.8)	172 (30.9)
To make a prosperous house	58 (19.3)	48 (18.8)	106 (19.0)
Others[a]	18 (6.0)	21 (8.2)	39 (7.0)
Total number of respondents	301	256	557

Notes: [a]Others include: 'look after other children'; 'brothers need sisters'; 'to understand mothers' problems'; 'to cry when parents die'. [b]Percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
c. Those who indicated that daughters were not essential to a couple (about 1%), or who were indifferent, were excluded from this analysis.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.3.1 Benefits to parents and family from having one daughter

Table 7.8 shows the opinion of Vettuvan husbands and wives on the benefits to parents and family from having one daughter. Slightly more than three-fourths of wives and about two-thirds of husbands felt that there would be fewer financial difficulties if a couple had only one daughter. Given the magnitude of dowry payments described in Chapter 6, this is not surprising. The ability of parents to provide education, good food and other opportunities was reported as the benefit by about one-third of the of the wives and a slightly lower proportion of husbands. Thus, having only one daughter ensures that parents can provide necessary facilities when daughters are young, marry them by paying dowry, meet the delivery expenses, provide gifts to grandchildren, and meet other needs of the daughters. A successful parent among the Vettuvans in the 1990s was one who could meet such demands.

The 'other' responses included 'daughters give more love to parents', 'there is this or that benefit', 'will look after parents', 'more love among siblings', 'parents can control', 'parents can give equal attention', and 'peace of mind to parents'. About 6 per cent of wives and 8 per cent of husbands reported no benefits to parents and family from having one daughter. Thus, the analysis suggests that the low financial liability accruing from having one daughter is the single most important factor that the Vettuvan wives and husbands identified.

Table 7.8: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion about the benefits to parents and family of parents having one daughter, Engandiyour, 1997

Benefits of having one daughter	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
No benefit	18 (5.8)	21 (7.8)	39 (6.8)
Low financial liability	234 (76.0)	169 (62.8)	403 (69.8)
Can give education and good food	112 (36.4)	77 (28.6)	189 (32.8)
Others[a]	29 (9.4)	46 (17.1)	75 (13.0)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes: [a]Others: 'daughters give more love to parents'; 'there is this or that benefit'; 'will look after parents'; 'more love among siblings'; 'parents can give equal attention'; 'peace of mind to parents'; 'parents can control'. [b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.3.2 Disadvantages to parents and family from having one daughter

Table 7.9 shows the opinion of Vettuvan wives and husbands on the costs having one daughter to parents and family. A significant majority (about 85 per cent) of the Vettuvan wives and husbands reported that there were no disadvantages to having only one daughter. This suggests that one daughter is an acceptable number to the Vettuvans in Engandiyour in the context of the security-mobility aspirations.

Nearly six per cent of wives and about two per cent of husbands had the view that there would be less assistance from only daughters in the day-to-day household work. About one-tenth of husbands and about four per cent of wives had the view that even one daughter is an economic drain on the family. This indicates the extend of financial burden that parents have in marrying and meeting other expenses of daughters.

Table 7.9: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the cost to parents and family of parents having one daughter, Engandiyour, 1997

Disadvantages of having one daughter	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
None	263 (85.4)	223 (82.9)	486 (84.2)
Less assistance from daughter	19 (6.2)	4 (1.5)	23 (4.0)
Economic drain	12 (3.9)	30 (11.2)	42 (7.3)
Others[a]	24 (7.8)	17 (6.3)	41 (7.0)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes:[a]Others include 'benefit and loss the same' and 'less support from daughters'.
[b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.3.3 Benefits to parents and family of having two or more daughters

While having one daughter is felt to be beneficial to a couple, having two or more daughters is not. Table 7.10 shows views of Vettuvan wives and husbands about the benefits parents and family would have if parents had two or more daughters. About three-fifths of the wives and husbands in the study reported that two or more daughters would bring no benefits to their parents and family. In other words, two or more daughters will not benefit parents in their efforts to rise in the social and economic hierarchy of Engandiyour.

About a quarter of wives and a slightly lower proportion of husbands pointed out that if daughters were educated and had a job, then two or more would be useful for parents and family. Once again, given the grim employment situation in Kerala and Vettuvans' own poor economic conditions, it is unlikely that Vettuvans could educate more than one daughter and provide them with suitable employment in the non-traditional sector. About 8 per cent of wives and husbands suggested that if a parent had two or more daughters, at least one would be able to help her parents in old age. Clearly, there was no precise benefit that wives and husbands in this study could point to as an advantage of having two or more daughters.

Table 7.10: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the benefits to parents and family of parents having two or more daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Advantages of having two or more daughters	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
None	182 (59.0)	159 (59.2)	341 (59.1)
If they can get good education and job, it is good	78 (25.3)	60 (22.3)	138 (23.9)
At least one will care for parents	24 (7.8)	21 (7.8)	45 (7.8)
Others[a]	24 (7.8)	28 (10.4)	52 (9.0)
No answer/can't say	10 (3.3)	6 (2.2)	16 (2.8)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Notes:[a]Others include: 'prosperity to family'; 'benefit and loss the same'; 'always people at home'; 'mourn when parents die', 'if rich then good'; 'can perform house work'; 'obedient'.
[b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.3.4 Disadvantages to parents and family of having two or more daughters

Table 7.11 shows the opinion of Vettuvan wives and husbands on costs to parents and family if the parents had two or more daughters. The most important costs of having two or more daughters are associated with dowry. About two-thirds of wives

and four-fifths of husbands felt that arranging dowry would be a serious problem if a Vettuvan couple had two or more daughters. Usually, parents of many daughters receive sympathy from villagers, anticipating the difficulty they will have in getting them married. Taking together the views on the benefits of having only one daughter and costs of having two or more daughters, it is clear that financial difficulties in arranging dowry expenses are the most important reason for the Vettuvans limiting the number of desired daughters to one.

Nearly a quarter of the wives and husbands showed concern in bringing up the daughters including educational costs, living expenses and meeting marriage expenses. A further important concern, expressed by one-fifth of wives and one-tenth of husbands, was that there would be expenses to be met every day if there were many daughters. These include delivery expenses, giving gold to the newborn child, and gifts to the daughter's family during festivals. Women in the focus-group interviews particularly expressed concerns over delivery-related expenses. Some respondents even said: 'daughters are life-long trouble; they need something or other every day from their parents or natal home; more daughters means less peace of mind to parents'. Some respondents mentioned the chances of being wayward as a cost of having two or more daughters, though this was not an important objection. If any daughter eloped, it was often considered the result of having more daughters as parents could not marry them on time. As previously mentioned, elopement is considered by the Vettuvans as an inferior way of marriage.

Table 7.11: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their opinion on the costs to parents and family of parents having two or more daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Disadvantages of having two or more daughters	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
None	14 (4.5)	1 (0.4)	15 (2.6)
Dowry will be a problem	215 (69.8)	216 (80.3)	431 (74.7)
To bring them up will be difficult	74 (24.0)	66 (24.5)	140 (24.3)
Chance to become divergent (loss of reputation)	43 (14.0)	36 (13.4)	79 (13.6)

There will be expenses every day	63 (20.4)	27 (10.0)	90 (15.6)
Others[a]	11 (3.6)	8 (3.0)	19 (3.3)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Note: [a]Others include: 'benefit and loss the same'; 'family economy will fall'; 'only costs'; and 'if rich no problem'; [b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

A comparison of the benefits and costs to parents and family of having two or more daughters with the benefits and costs of having one daughter is given in Table 7.12. While nearly 97 per cent of the respondents (wives and husbands) indicated one way or another the disadvantages of having two or more daughters, benefits from two or more daughters were stated by less than two-fifths of the respondents (wives and husbands). Benefits to parents and family from having one daughter were reported by 93 per cent of the respondents (wives and husbands) and costs by only about 16 per cent. This clearly suggests that among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour one daughter is a norm.

Table 7.12: Percentage distribution of Vettuvan respondents according to their opinion on the benefits and costs to parents and family of parents having one daughter, and two or more daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Benefits/Costs	1 daughter	2 or more daughters
Benefits to parents and family	93.2[b]	17.0[a,d]
Costs to parents and family	15.8[c]	97.4[e]

Note: [a]This considers conditional benefits such as 'if all daughters work, then there is benefit' and 'if all have good character, then there is benefit' as not benefits of two or more daughters.
Sources: Tables 7.13[b], 7.14[c], 7.15[d]and 7.16[e].

7.4 Managing old age: how currently married couples saw it

Following the examination of the various security and mobility benefits and costs to parents and family from having sons and daughters, this section examines the more specific issue of old-age support of the wives and husbands who are not yet considered old, at least in strict age terms, i.e., 60 years. For example: what do the Vettuvan wives and husbands in the present study think about their old-age economic support? Do they consider sons an important old-age asset? Do they consider daughters an old-age asset? Do they consider economic assets or pensions for their old age? How far have these old-age security considerations shaped their fertility levels and preferences?

In order to understand the old-age security strategies of the Vettuvan wives and husbands in Engandiyour, a question about their plans to meet their economic requirements in old age was asked. Table 7.13 shows answers to this question. Nearly two-thirds of the wives and slightly more husbands had no plan at all for old age. Children were reported as a source of old-age security only by about a quarter of the wives and about 15 per cent of the husbands. Around one-tenth of the wives and husbands had not given a thought to old age. These answers may indicate different life-cycle stages of the wives and husbands in the study. For example, very young wives and husbands may not have given any thought as to how they would manage their old age, while couples approaching 50 years may have been thinking about their children as their old-age security assets. It is, therefore, necessary to explore further to find out the old-age security value of children. In order to do so, a variety of follow-up questions were asked.

Table 7.13: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their proposed strategies to meet old-age economic requirements, Engandiyour, 1997

Strategies to meet old age economic requirements	Wife N (%)[b]	Husband N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
Nothing	201 (65.3)	188 (69.9)	389 (67.2)
Children	78 (25.3)	39 (14.5)	117 (20.4)
Not given a thought	37 (12.0)	31 (11.5)	68 (11.8)
Others[a]	27 (8.8)	21 (7.8)	48 (8.4)
Total number of respondents	308	269	577

Note:[a]Others include: 'do not have children'; 'from savings'; 'chits' (a form of saving organised by local financial institutions); 'old age pension'; 'will work up to death'; 'farmer's pension'.
[b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.4.1 Expectation of old-age support from sons

Table 7.13 noted an unclear view about old-age security management plans among the Vettuvan husbands and wives in Engandiyour. However, interestingly, when we asked whether they would expect old-age support from their sons, nearly nine-tenths of the wives and husbands answered positively (Table 7.14). This clearly indicates that parents expect old-age support from their sons, but that they did not seem to have such an expectation from sons as an explicit objective in producing sons. On the contrary, if they had sons, they expected them to provide support in old age. A similar view was advanced by Dyson (1991) and Vlassoff (1991) in their articles on child labour and fertility. As indicated in Table 4.18, nearly one-tenth of those who had adopted a terminal family planning method did not have a son, once again showing, at least in some cases, that to have sons was not the sole reproductive objective, although it is very important.

Table 7.14: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their expectation of economic assistance from their sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Expectation of economic assistance from sons in old age	Wife N (%)	Husband N (%)	Total N (%)
Expect assistance from sons	208 (89.7)	184 (90.6)	392 (90.1)
Do not expect assistance from sons	21 (9.0)	13 (6.5)	41 (7.8)
Not sure/Do not know	3 (1.3)	6 (2.9)	9 (2.1)
Total	232 (100)	203 (100)	435 (100)

Note: This question was asked of those wives and husbands who expected old-age support from their children. Numbers of wives and husbands who expected old-age support from their children were 232 and 203, respectively.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

Reasons for expecting old-age support from sons are shown in Table 7.15. Nearly three-quarters of those husbands and wives in the study who expected old-age support from their sons believed that parents provided all possible care for their children when they were young, and that the children would have to care for their parents when they became old. This forms the core argument of Vettuvans to expect support from sons in old age. Taking this table together with Tables 7.13 and 7.14, it is possible to argue that (i) to have a son is a chance and, therefore, to depend on a chance for old-age support is implausible for the Vettuvans; (ii) however, once they have a son, then they expect old-age support from him, (iii) because they provide him with all facilities accounting to their ability.

Table 7.15: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to the reasons for expecting assistance from sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons for expecting old age assistance from sons	Wife N (%)	Husband N (%)	Total N (%)
We have brought them up, so they have to support us in our old age	162 (77.8)	138 (75.1)	300 (76.6)
They will have some job	21 (10.1)	11 (6.0)	32 (8.2)
Others[a]	18 (8.7)	26 (14.1)	44 (11.1)
No answer	7 (3.4)	9 (4.8)	16 (4.1)
Total	208 (100)	184 (100)	392 (100)

Notes: [a]Others include: 'only son'; 'good children', 'obedient'; 'hope to get help'.
This question was addressed to only those 208 wives and 184 husbands who expected old age support from son (Table 7.14).
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

As indicated in Table 7.14, less than one-tenth of the respondents reported that they did not expect any assistance from their sons. Reasons for not expecting old-age support from sons are given in Table 7.16. Nearly half the respondents believed that in the present circumstances of a higher cost of living it might not be possible for the children to support many people, including their own parents. These respondents, in general, seemed to recognise that *kaalam maari,* times had changed, and this was the inevitable consequence of such change. They blamed modern attitudes as the main culprit for these changes. The proportion of Vettuvan wives and husbands not expecting old-age support from sons being less than 10 per cent, this seems not to be the mainstream thinking of the Vettuvans.

Table 7.16: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their reasons for not expecting assistance from sons, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons for not expecting assistance from sons	Wife N (%)	Husband N (%)	Total N (%)
Children can earn only to feed their family	19 (90.4)	11 (84.6)	30 (88.2)
Times have changed	2 (9.6)	2 (15.4)	4 (11.8)
Total	21 (100)	13 (100)	34 (100)

Note: This question was addressed to 21 wives and 13 husbands who did not expect old-age support from sons (Table 7.14).
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

In sum, the discussion in this section suggests that Vettuvan wives and husbands in this study expected old-age support from their sons. However, this expectation does not seems to have come before they had a son, suggesting that a very high old-age support value of sons co-existed with less clear-cut plans of old age security.

7.4.2 Expectation of old-age support from daughters

This section addresses the issue of how in Engandiyour Vettuvan wives and husbands viewed the daughters in regard to their economic old-age security. Table 7.17 shows old-age support expected from daughters: slightly more than half of the wives and about two-thirds of husbands did not expect old-age support from their daughters. This suggests a limited role for daughters in their parents' old-age support compared to the role of sons. Further analysis indicated that these wives and husbands have a son to depend on for old age. It suggests that old-age support is expected from a son, but if there is no son, then it must come from a daughter.

However, it is important to note that about half of the wives and husbands expected economic help from their daughters. From the demographic point of view, the current fertility levels of Vettuvans are indicative of some couples having no son. This indeed was revealed in the present study (Table 4.11). Thus, some husbands and wives may expect economic support from daughters as they have no sons or dependable non-familial support system.

This expectation of old-age economic support from daughters, however, did not appear as a reason for the necessity to have daughters. It seems, therefore, that old-age support expectations from daughters are an inevitable consequence of fertility decline that results in some couples having only daughters. For example, if there is no son, the property of the parents will be inherited by daughters, and hence the responsibility to take care of parents in old age. These issues are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

To sum up, the expected role of daughters for old-age security among the Vettuans of Engandiyour was less than that of the sons. Vettuvan wives and husbands in the present study considered their sons as a source of security, even if they had a daughter. However, if they had no sons, a daughter was considered as a source of old-age security.

Table 7.17: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their expectation of old-age economic support from daughters, Engandiyour, 1997

Expectation of old-age economic support from daughters	Wife N (%)	Husband N (%)	Total N (%)
Not expected	110 (54.7)	115 (66.1)	225 (60.0)
Expected	85 (42.3)	51 (29.3)	136 (36.3)
No answer	6 (3.0)	8 (4.6)	14 (3.7)
Total	201 (100)	174 (100)	375 (100)

Note: There were 95 cases with no daughter among husbands; there were 107 cases with no daughter among wives (for details, see Table 4.11).
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

7.4.3 Expectation of old-age pension

The old-age pension, or Agricultural Workers' Pension, was given to economically poor individuals in each family in Kerala. Table 7.18 shows the views of Vettuvan wives and husbands in Engandiyour regarding their expectation of various pensions. Slightly over half of wives and husbands reported that they would receive the government pension. Nearly two-fifths of wives and one-third of husbands reported

that they did not expect to receive an old age pension.

Table 7.18: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their expectation of government pension, Engandiyour, 1997

Expectation of government pension	Wife N (%)	Husband N (%)	Total N (%)
Expect	174 (56.5)	145 (53.9)	319 (55.3)
Do not expect	124 (40.3)	90 (33.5)	214 (37.1)
Not sure what will happen	5 (1.6)	17 (6.3)	22 (3.8)
Do not know	5 (1.6)	17 (6.3)	22 (3.8)
Total	308 (100)	269 (100)	577 (100)

Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

Those who expected to receive the old-age pension were asked their reasons for such expectations; the answers are given in Table 7.19. The most important reason was the feeling that it was their right to receive a pension from the government. Slightly over three-fifths of wives and over half of the husbands reported this view. There was a widespread belief among the Vettuvans that governments should provide assistance to needy people. This feeling had some relation to the various Communist governments, present and past, in Kerala. The other reasons reported for hoping for a government pension included 'poverty', 'lack of a son', 'sons may not help', and 'hope to receive it through agriculture pension scheme'. Some of these views were influenced by the eligibility criteria set by the village Panchayath for approving the old-age pension. For example, if the applicant for the old-age pension had a grown-up son, he or she was unlikely to be granted the pension.

Table 7.19: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their reasons for expecting government pension in old age, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons for expecting government pension	Wife N (%)[c]	Husband N (%)[c]	Total N (%)[c]
When not in a position to work government should give pension	111 (63.9)	82 (56.2)	193 (60.5)
Poverty	58 (33.3)	40 (27.6)	98 (30.7)
Have no sons	22 (12.6)	16 (11.0)	38 (11.9)
Others[b]	25 (14.3)	23 (15.9)	48 (15.1)
Total number of respondents	174	145	319

Notes: a. This question was addressed to 174 wives and 145 husbands who replied that they expected the old-age pension from the government (Table 7.22). [b]Others include: 'Hope to get', 'Sons may not help', 'Paying contribution for agriculture pension'. [c]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

Various reasons given by Vettuvan wives and husbands for not expecting the government old-age pension are shown in Table 7.20: the most important reason was the administrative difficulty involved, such as the procedure of applying, and following it up. It was the widely held view in Engandiyour that an affiliation with the political party in the village Panchayath was necessary for access to benefits that operated through the village. Vettuvan husbands and wives in Engandiyour also recognised that having a son would debar them from becoming eligible for the old-age pension. The very small amount of the pension and the difficulty in getting it clearly indicate the lack of a well established old-age support system in Engandiyour.

Table 7.20: Distribution of Vettuvan husbands and wives according to their reasons for not expecting the government old-age pension, Engandiyour, 1997

Reasons for not expecting old-age pension	Wives N (%)[b]	Husbands N (%)[b]	Total N (%)[b]
Have sons	18 (14.5)	10 (11.1)	28 (13.1)
Administrative difficulties	39 (31.5)	53 (58.9)	92 (43.0)
Will die before being eligible for pension	11 (8.9)	7 (7.8)	18 (8.4)
No-one in the family or relatives receives it	24 (19.4)	14 (15.6)	38 (17.8)
Not thought of such things	17 (13.7)	15 (16.6)	32 (15.0)
Husband will receive it	3 (2.4)	--	3 (1.4)
No answer	12 (9.6)	--	12 (5.5)
Total number of respondents	124	90	214

Notes: a. This question was addressed to 124 wives and 90 husbands who replied that they did not expect the old-age pension from the government (Table 7.22). [b]Total percentages exceed 100 owing to multiple responses.
Sources: Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997; Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997.

In sum up, the analysis of the role of children in old-age support in this section suggests that parents expect their children—sons and daughters—to provide old-age support for them. There was no viable alternative to one's own children for old-age support in the village or for that matter in Kerala, as the pension scheme provided only a nominal amount. Thus to ensure old-age security, husbands and wives in this study felt that it was essential to have a son. However, parents also realised that to receive old-age support from their sons, like their counterparts in other communities[19], Vettuvans should have educated and employed sons. The social and economic situations in Engandiyour, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, suggest that this can be achieved easily with one son.

[19]Field work gathered ample evidence that the elderly in the economically better-off families received better old-age support than those in the poor families.

Some Vettuvan wives and husbands expected support from daughters. However, this was not felt to be an expected benefit from having daughters, by parents in this study. Therefore, in the circumstances prevailing in Engandiyour and Kerala, daughters are to be seen as alternative to sons, and not complementary to sons, for old-age support.

7.5 Conclusions

This chapter has examined how many children and of what sex are important in the security and mobility of Vettuvan parents and children in Engandiyour. The analysis revealed that in the changed social and economic environment discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, having several sons was believed to be more of a liability than an asset to the parents. One son, on the other hand, was considered essential for a variety of social and economic mobility reasons. The analysis also demonstrated that daughters in general were considered as having a limited security and mobility role. Vettuvans considered one daughter an acceptable number for their traditional and practical reasons, but were totally against having more, as that would entail double the dowry costs and thus reduce the security and mobility prospects of the family.

It is possible to conclude from this chapter that the level of fertility deemed necessary for security and mobility for the Vettuvans in Engandiyour was having one son and one daughter. While the role of a son was mostly to enhance the family's economic security and mobility, a daughter's role was more traditional and focused on practical assistance including old-age support. The fertility levels and trends revealed in Chapter 4 are thus a reflection of these attitudes of the Vettuvans.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

The fertility transition of the scheduled castes in Kerala is unique in India. As revealed in Chapters 1 and 3, in the 1992-93 Kerala NFHS, the scheduled castes, the lowest castes in the traditional caste system, had a total fertility rate (TFR) of 1.37 children per woman. This is far lower than the TFR noted for the total population of Kerala in the same survey. No other Indian state demonstrated substantially lower fertility for its scheduled castes than for the total population. Perhaps even more significantly no other Indian state has scheduled castes' fertility lower than or even close to that of Kerala's scheduled castes. Another unique feature of fertility in Kerala is the turnaround in the scheduled castes' and higher-caste Hindus' fertility. The 1992-93 Kerala NFHS has evinced a lower fertility to scheduled castes than Hindus as a whole. However, surveys conducted in Kerala before the 1990s revealed that the scheduled castes had higher fertility than the total Hindus. Thus, Kerala has many unique features on its demographic front.

A large number of studies have examined Kerala's success in controlling fertility; in general these have treated Kerala as a homogeneous society. As reviewed in Chapter 3, such studies have produced a variety of explanations: improved education, high status of women, an ecology that facilitated better health and communication, poverty, and well administered family planning, to name a few important ones. However, although the transition of Kerala society from a traditional caste system to a non-traditional caste system is a landmark in the social and economic history of Kerala, this has not figured in any of the above explanations of fertility change in Kerala. This thesis argues that a perspective that considers caste-system changes in Kerala as a basic factor that transformed social and economic relationships is essential for an understanding of the fertility of Kerala's scheduled castes.

As explained in Chapter 1, the main objective of this research has been to understand the causes of fertility change among the Vettuvans, a scheduled caste community in Kerala, using the institutional approach proposed by Greenhalgh (1988) and McNicoll (1994). This in the present research involved investigating fertility levels and trends (Chapter 4); security-mobility goals and strategies (Chapter 6); and security-mobility costs and benefits of children (Chapters 6 and 7). The study of the institutional environment included the social, economic, and political situation in Kerala (Chapters 2 and 3) and Engandiyour village (Chapter 5). As discussed in Chapter 1, the field work to collect detailed data on the above aspects adopted the micro-demographic approach developed by Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell (1988).

A transition in fertility among the Vettuvans in Engandiyour from a moderately high level to a very low level during the period 1960s-1990s is evident from the analysis of cohort fertility data. In 1997 the levels of fertility were indicative of fertility well below replacement level. As revealed in Chapter 4, the TFR and TMFR were 1.2 and 1.8 children per woman, respectively. Related to the low levels of fertility is the high level of family planning use among the Vettuvans. About two-thirds of the couples practised a modern terminal family planning method, and only a tiny proportion used temporary methods. Significantly, the number of children born was more important as a factor in the adoption of terminal family planning methods than whether the children were boys or girls. Among the Vettuvans, reproductive careers of women were simple: marry late, have two children quickly, and then get sterilised. The Vettuvan fertility is unique in India, where fertility is generally much higher and shows strong son preference, higher age at sterilisation, and lower age at marriage.

As shown in Chapter 5, the caste-system changes triggered by the land reform of the 1970s have led to fundamental social and economic change in Engandiyour that changed the cost and benefit of children and hence fertility. This reform gave the Vettuvans ownership of small parcels of land: their status changed from tenant to owner. This marked the end of an era of tenancy-related exploitation. With land reform, the previous landowners, the higher castes, lost their traditional grip on their former tenants, the scheduled castes. They could no longer demand work from scheduled castes for low wages or for no pay; they could no longer prevent them from working for other people; they could no longer prevent them from taking other occupations. On the social front, the land reform brought new behavioural changes to both lower castes and higher castes. While behavioural changes of the lower

castes worked to narrow their social distance from other communities, it was also essential that the upper castes changed their behaviour to indicate the new relationship between the previous tenants and landlords. Land reform also gave the Vettuvans a sense of security as well as self-respect. Security meant that now they had their own land and no one could evict them. Self-respect came because they were no longer tenants, and thus they were free from several obligations of tenancy. Thus, the reform attacked the two basic principles upon which the caste system was based: economic exploitation and social subordination. It is, however, important to recognise that further changes within the Vettuvan community and in Kerala as a whole were needed for this progress to be sustained and improved. As I will explain later in this chapter, fertility control of Vettuvans was an essential step in this direction.

Migration from Engandiyour to the Gulf countries for employment, which began in the mid-1970s, provided further impetus to the caste-system changes brought by the land reform. Although participation of the Vettuvans in the migration to the Gulf countries was insignificant compared to that of other communities, the migration had enormous influence in changing their social and economic status in relation to other communities. The Gulf migration worked mainly in two ways to dissolve the caste system in the village. Firstly, the remittances from the Gulf countries generated immense demand for labour as construction of new houses and other allied activities in the Engandiyour increased significantly after the beginning of the migration. Since the labour supply in Engandiyour was less than the demand, the Vettuvans could expect respectful behaviour from those who needed labour. This included the higher castes, thus reducing caste-based interpersonal behaviour. Secondly, Gulf migration provided opportunities for many Vettuvans to diversify their occupations. As remittances poured in, people started constructing and renovating houses, and investing money in property, such as land and vehicles. These activities in the village needed skilled workers such as masons, carpenters, welders, electricians, plumbers, auto-mechanics, and taxi drivers. Many Vettuvans, particularly the younger generation, changed their occupations to one of these high-demand skilled areas. This has changed the occupation-based difference between the lower and upper castes. Such changes also generated more and more interaction between the upper castes and the Vettuvans. All these changes had a tremendous effect on the behaviour of the upper castes towards the lower castes, and thus speeded the process of caste-system change in Engandiyour. In short, social and economic mobility became realistic aspirations for the Vettuvans.

As demonstrated in Chapter 5, in 1997 the caste system did not determine social and economic interaction between the Vettuvans and members of other communities in Engandiyour. The principles that governed the interaction between members of the lower and upper castes in 1997 were the educational and economic status of the lower castes. An educated Vettuvan, for example, would have a higher degree of interaction with the higher castes than would a less educated Vettuvan. Although economic status is not as significant as education in determining inter-caste interactions, economically better-off Vettuvans have frequent interaction with non-Vettuvans compared to economically lower-status Vettuvans. What limited the interaction of the higher castes with Vettuvans was their poor educational and economic status. In 1997, although caste retained some identity value, it is no longer used to discriminate or promote inter-personal and inter-family relationships. There has been a clear transition in the Vettuvan status from a lower caste to a poor working class, and in the society as a whole to a non-traditional caste system model.

Having been freed from the traditional caste system, the next issue for the Vettuvans was to retain the achieved new status (security), and to improve it, (mobility), by enhancing their social and economic position. As shown in Chapter 6, the two important mobility goals of the Vettuvans were to improve their social status; and to become economically better off. The mobility units of the Vettuvans were the patrilineal, patriarchal and patrilocal family, the *kudumbam*. For reasons related to tradition, such a society depended on sons for its social and economic survival and enhancement. The strategies to enhance social and economic status adopted by the Vettuvans were to increase their education and to take up non-traditional occupations. Educating children became the prime concern of the Vettuvans. The most important reason for educating children was to enhance their social and economic position. Economic progress achieved through education is considered to have more prestige than success achieved through working as a labourer or through low-level jobs. No Vettuvans wanted their children to be labourers. A job that required 'paper and pen' was considered a symbol of prestige. As indicated, to achieve social and economic mobility, the Vettuvans require sons. Sons remain at home after marriage, while daughters leave after their marriage; thus, compared to sons, daughters have lower mobility value in the Vettuvan community.

A further crucial factor in Vettuvan life is the issue of family division. As was shown in Chapter 6, before the 1950s, division of a Vettuvan family took place when the eldest married son started having children or when his younger brother married, whichever came first. The main reason for the division of a Vettuvan

family was the difficulty of accommodating the growing number of members in their small hut. These divisions were possible since it was easy to get land because of the benefits that landlords foresaw from having tenants. Thus, family divisions in the past did not involve landed property. In such a situation having more sons had little or no cost for the Vettuvans, as regards arranging land for housing.

After the Agrarian Reform Bill was first passed in 1957, but before the actual implementation of land reform in the 1970s, availability of land on tenancy became extremely difficult. During this period no landowner was interested in leasing his land to tenants for fear that the new tenant would claim his land. Also, no land owner would permit the tenant to divide his land, again fearing that both families would claim land at a later date. Thus, from 1957 when the Agrarian Reform Bill was passed, until the implementation of land reform in the 1970s, Vettuvan families were unable to divide.

Once land reform was implemented and the Vettuvans each received ownership of a small parcel of land, division of families resumed, probably at a much faster rate. However, there was a major difference: this time the division took place on their own land. This was the first time that Vettuvan family division was accompanied by division of landed property. In the village an average one-tenth of an acre of land was given to a tenant household under the land reform, usually where their house was located. According to the Vettuvan Household Survey, the land size of each Vettuvan family in 1997 suggested that there had been at least one division of the land received through the land reform. For example, a quarter of the households had less than four cents of land; another half possessed between five and eight cents. The family structure analysis suggests that slightly over half the Vettuvan families were nuclear: the potential partition among children would depend on how many male children each family had, and when each son married. The average number of sons in these families was one. Thus, the majority of these nuclear families would remain undivided in this generation, at least. Assuming the pattern of family formation in the late 1990s, partition is imminent in about one-third of the joint and stem families in which there are married brothers living together. Once these families divide, the land availability in nearly all the Vettuvan households will reach a level where further division of the land will be practically impossible. The diminishing of family land with each family division poses questions about the future land needs of the Vettuvans' children.

Chapter 6 also showed how migration to the Gulf countries had influenced the difficult land situation of the Vettuvans in two opposing ways. On the one hand, remittances increased the land prices and made it almost impossible for the Vettuvans to buy land, as most of them were labourers or low-income earners compared to those families who received remittances from the Gulf. On the other hand, some Vettuvans were able to benefit from the increase in land prices, as they could sell their land (if it was in a prime location) and buy more and cheaper land in a less expensive location. This, and the government housing scheme for the poor, alleviated part of the land problem for the Vettuvans in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But by 1997 such avenues seemed to have closed, at least for the time being, because no unused government land was available in the village. Moreover, there was very little market value for very small plots, say less than ten cents, the size possessed by the Vettuvans. Under the economic situation prevailing in the village in the late 1990s, and to a large extent in Kerala as a whole, it was difficult for the Vettuvans, who still were in the lowest economic group, to buy any land in the village. It is also clear that the existing family land does not permit any further division in the given village context. In this situation, it is a heavy cost for the family if they have more than a son.

Another crucial change in the Vettuvans' circumstances has been in the form and consequences of marriage. The marriage practices of the Vettuvans before the land reform were elopement and arranged marriages. While elopement was mostly practised by the poorest, marriages were arranged by the better off. As tenants, parents could not take the primary responsibility for their daughters' marriage because they depended on the landlord for a loan of money, groceries, firewood, and other necessities. Such opportunities from the landlord depended on his economic position and personal readiness to assist a marriage. Parents encouraged elopement as it was hard for them to arrange marriages. Landlords were also reported to have supported elopement as they did not need to lend money or give goods to their tenants. Elopement marriages were possible because young men and women started independent work for the landlord from age 16-18. It is important to mention here that a landlord typically had several tenants and this allowed for the mixing of several families. The workplace provided avenues for friendships for the young Vettuvan boys and girls. Normally, elopement marriages took place only among men and women around 20 years of age, because such marriages required some money, courage, support from some relatives, and determination. These requirements may have been difficult to achieve at earlier ages, say 17 or 18 years. Marriages arranged by parents, on the other hand, were reported to have taken place

when the girl was around 15 and the boy around 18; but such marriages were rare. Overall, among the Vettuvans, tenancy-related, poor economic conditions did not promote child marriages, but pushed the marriage age higher. Thus, before the land reform, daughters were not a substantial cost to parents, as elopement was the common marriage practice.

After the land reform, marriages arranged by parents with the consent of both bride and groom became common among the Vettuvans. Since elopement marriages were practised when they were tenants and subordinate under the caste system, elopement was now considered inferior to arranged marriages. With arranged marriages the practice of dowry also emerged. Dowry was considered something that only the socially and economically better off could practise, and hence a good vehicle for demonstrating social mobility. In 1997 the prevailing dowry among the Vettuvans was far beyond their average earning capacity. Nearly one-third of the Vettuvan families surveyed had debt incurred from arranging dowry. Arranging dowry was an important reason for the Vettuvan couples to desire only one daughter.

What seems to have made it possible to arrange such large dowries was the influence of remittances from the Middle East to the village. Increased land prices made it possible for the Vettuvans to mortgage or sell their land to meet the dowry-related expenses, partly, if not fully. An increase in wages and the ability of villagers to lend money to Vettuvans have also helped the Vettuvans to arrange dowry. Since it took several years for a Vettuvan to arrange the dowry, parents could not marry their daughters early, and therefore prevented the age at marriage from falling. Similarly, when marriages were delayed for want of dowry, daughters continued their education. Parents were compelled to send their daughters to school or college until their marriages were arranged, because the most wanted brides among the Vettuvans were those either studying or in a non-traditional job. Parents often used schooling as a pretext to delay marriage, even though their financial difficulties may have been the real reason.

In sum, what changed in the marriage practices of Vettuvans after the implementation of the land reform was the introduction of dowry to those families who had not practised it in the past, and reinforcement of the practice for those who already practised it. The effect of dowry was to considerably increase the cost of daughters in the 1990s compared to before the 1970s.

In the institutional environment under the non-traditional caste system, sons were considered to be an important source of economic and social support in old age. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, parents realised that in the changed environment support from sons was more likely if they were better educated and well employed. Given their financial status, it was very hard for the Vettuvans to educate and arrange proper employment for their children. The Vettuvans placed a high value on having fewer children and educating them to make them employable. They also wanted no further division of their small piece of land received through land reform. One son was considered the most appropriate number, should the parents want maximum benefit. The desire to have fewer sons was a strategy to have better support from children and to make their children's lives better, thus facilitating social and economic security and mobility of the family.

Daughters, too, were considered essential to couples, mostly for their non-monetary roles. A daughter's role before marriage was largely confined to helping parents in performing household work. After marriage their role was to physically help parents when they were old or sick. An unmarried daughter was considered less able to help her parents economically in the late 1990s compared to the 1970s because of decreasing work participation before marriage as daughters now went to school. After marriage the daughter's own family responsibilities and the increased distance between their houses made it difficult for the daughter to provider longer and sustained help to parents when sick or old. Parents surveyed in this study wanted to have a maximum of one daughter.

The fertility patterns of the Vettuvans analysed in Chapter 4 are essentially a reflection of these two factors: benefits and costs of sons and daughters. First, the benefits of having children are determined by the security and mobility role of children in the non-traditional caste system. Secondly, the costs are set by the institutional environment on bringing up children to a level that will be needed for social and economic mobility discussed in Chapter 7. Thus fertility was a key aspect of mobility for Vettuvans in Engandiyour. Vettuvans need one son; they also like to have one daughter. But to have more than one child of each sex is to run the risk of either creating great conflict between sons or incurring huge dowry costs for daughters. In this context, very low fertility is essential to maximise the scope for social and economic mobility. Thus the Vettuvans' circumstances provide a classic case of Dumont's (1890) social capillarity.

8.3 Implications for past and future research, and policy

The implications of the present study for the fertility of the scheduled castes in Kerala are clearly significant. This study revealed that fertility in the Vettuvan community changed as a result of the combined effects of caste-system changes, land reform, and Gulf migration. Since land reform took place throughout the state in the 1970s in a very effective way, it is probable this has influenced the traditional caste system in the entire state to transform it to a non-traditional caste system. Gulf migration, although it had specific pockets in the initial phases, spread to most areas of the state in the 1980s and 1990s. The effect of Gulf migration was felt throughout Kerala, with higher land prices, labour shortages, and a higher standard of living. It is, therefore, possible to anticipate essentially identical causation for fertility decline in other scheduled-caste communities in Kerala.

With regard to the turnaround in fertility between the scheduled cases and the rest of the Hindu population in Kerala, the present study suggests that the scheduled castes responded more significantly than the non-scheduled caste Hindus to the caste system changes, land reform, and Gulf migration. That means it was more important for the scheduled castes than for the non-scheduled castes to reduce their fertility in order to maintain and improve their social and economic situation in Kerala.

In the light of the present research it is also justifiable to recommend further research to understand fertility transition in Kerala. As demonstrated in this study, caste system changes have brought several behavioural changes in the upper castes, and possibly among other religious communities. It is most likely that upper castes and other religious communities in Kerala have also responded to changes in the caste system to protect and improve their social and economic positions. Thus, the theme for future research is that caste-system changes, and the nature of social mobility, have played significant roles in the fertility transition of all religious and caste communities in Kerala, although the specific paths to fertility decline may differ.

As the Kerala model of caste-system changes and subsequent fertility decline caused by land reform and Gulf migration has a unique social, economic and political history, it is not feasible to replicate it exactly in other parts of India. However, the caste system has been a common element in Indian society, north or south. In the light of present study it is possible to suggest that caste-system changes can influence fertility to come down through changes in the costs and benefits of

children. However, how the traditional caste system can be changed to a non-traditional caste system depends on the particular social, economic and political environment of that particular state or region. Research is needed to identify such factors more widely.

Regarding the question of why fertility of the scheduled castes in Kerala is the lowest among the scheduled castes in India, the present research cannot be definitive, but it provides ample evidence for speculation. A possible reason traceable from the present research is that Kerala has transformed itself into a non-traditional caste system society more completely than societies in other parts of India. In other words, scheduled castes in Kerala have received the opportunity to visualise their progress more realistically than scheduled-caste communities elsewhere in India. This observation matches Davis's (1963) observations on North-west Europe; the Schneiders' (1996) findings from Italy; Blake's (1972) investigation on Western Europeans; and Greenhalgh's (1988) findings from China.

Focusing on India, the implications of the study for understanding fertility are potentially significant. There are states in India where the traditional caste system still exists and where fertility is still high. The present study suggests that caste-system changes in those areas of India are necessary conditions for more rapid changes in fertility. As the existing positive discrimination polices of the government have limited impact on the traditional caste system and the fertility of scheduled castes in India, in general, policies that are effective enough to change the traditional caste system are very much needed. Ultimately, the more time taken to transform the traditional caste system in India to a non-traditional caste system, the longer it will take to move from high to low fertility. This research further suggests that unless and until the scheduled castes are given the opportunity to visualise their prospects of social and economic mobility by breaking the traditional caste system principles, little will be achieved in controlling their fertility, which is very high in several states of India. In the new millennium, therefore, we must discuss caste openly, collect details in the Censuses to know the social and economic status of various castes, and investigate appropriate interventions to transform the traditional caste system to a non-traditional caste system.

The present research suggests that fertility decline can take place in the poorest section of a society. While education, occupation, age at marriage, family planning, status of women, sex preference, and old-age security have important bearing on fertility, the present study reveals that these factors are offshoots of the social and

economic organisation of the society. Therefore, understanding how a society is organised is crucially important to explanations of fertility in terms of education, occupation and other factors. As the present research has shown, the institutional approach, incorporating the social, economic and political aspects of the society, and explicitly addressing the links between macro- and micro-level change in historical and contemporary perspectives, forms a potentially very helpful means to explain the determinants of fertility in the fullest sense.

Appendix-1
Survey Instruments

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1. Vettuvan Household Survey, 1997

A. Section: Identification

001 Scheduled number:
002 Date of interview:
003 Name of interviewer:
004 Respondent's name:
005 Name of head of household:
006 House number an some identification mark:
007 Write time now from your watch:

B. Section: Housing conditions

100 Type of roof:
101 Type of wall (materials used):
102 Type of floor (materials used):
103 Number of rooms, except kitchen:
104 Source of drinking water:
105 Source of water for other purposes:
106 Electricity connection:
107 Main cooking fuel:
108 Second main cooking fuel:
109 Modern latrine:

C. Section: Usual residents

Include usual residents. Those who have not visited this household for the last 3 Years will not be a part of this section.

Name	Relationship head of the household	Age/ sex	Marital status	Completed education	Main occupation	Work place

200 Does everyone mentioned above eat from the same kitchen?
201 How many family units are there in this household that prepare food separately?
202 Why is it that such family units do not have separate living arrangements? Give two reasons:

D. Section: Household items

300 Chair:
301 Number of chairs:
302 Value:
303 Table:
304 Number of tables:
305 Value:
306 Cupboard:
307 Number of cupboards:
308 Value:
309 Cot:
310 Number of cots:
311 Value:
312 Radio:
313 Number of radios:
314 Value:

E. Section: Domestic animals

400 Cow/buffalo:
401 Number:
402 Value:
403 Goat:
404 Number:
405 Value:
406 Chicken:
407 Number:
408 Value:

F. Section: Land holding

500 How many cents of land does this family possess?
501 How many cents are of coconut fields?
502 How many cents are of barren fields?
503 How much of the total land mentioned was received through land reform?
504 When did this family receive land through land reform?
505 Who is the legal occupant of the land?

G. Section: Consumption

600 For how many people does this family prepare food?
601 How many kilos of rice would this family need for a week?
602 How much money does this family spend in a week on groceries?
603 How much money does this family spend on fish in a week?
604 How much money does this family spend on meat/eggs in a week?
605 How much money does this family spend on fruits and vegetables in a week?
606 How much money does this family spent in a week on eating from restaurants?
607 Does this family subscribe to any daily newspaper?
608 Does this family subscribe to any weekly/monthly magazine?

H. Section: Debt

700 Does any one have debt in this family?
701 How much?
702 Debts? note items:
703 Reasons for debt? Give two important reasons:

I. Section: Inter-community interaction

800 Who is your nearest neighbour? Give his/her house name:
801 Did your family members visit them in the last two months?
802-803 For what purposes did you or your family members visit the neighbour? Give two purposes.
804 Where does the conversation take place?
805 Do they offer you anything to drink/eat?
806-807 Why do they not offer anything to drink/eat? Give only two reasons:
808 Did they visit your house during the last two months?
809-810 For what purposes do they visit your house?
811 Where does the conversation normally take place?
812 Do you offer them anything to drink/eat?
813-814 Why do you not offer anything to drink/eat?

J. Section: Household management

900 Who fetch drinking water in this family?
901 Who prepares meals in this family?
902 Who prepares meals when the above person goes to work?
903 Who does cleaning work in the family?
904 Who does it when the above persons go to work?
905 Who does kitchen cleaning work?
906 Who does it when the above persons go to work?
907 Who does washing of clothes in the family?
908 Who does it when the above persons go to work?
909 Who takes care of domestic animals in the family?
910 Who does shopping in the family?

K. Section: Life styles

1000 What do you and your family normally have for breakfast?
1001 What do you and your family normally have at 11 am?
1002 What do you and your family normally have for lunch?
1003 What do you and your family normally have for dinner?

L. Section: Other details

2000 Any other relevant information?
2001 Write time from your watch now:

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2. Vettuvan Wife's Survey, 1997
3. Vettuvan Husband's Survey, 1997

A. Section: Basic information

001 Husband/wife:
002 Schedule number:
003 Household schedule number and address:
004 Husband/wife schedule number:
005 Name of the interviewer:
006 Date of interview:
007 Record time now from your watch:
008 Name of the respondent:
009 Respondent's husband/wife:
010 Completed age as on Vishu (14April[1]):
011 Completed education:

B. Section: Work-related information

Main occup ation	Hours in a day	Days in a week	Weeks in a month	Months in a year	Daily wage	To whom wage is given
200	201	202	203	204	205	206
212	213	214	215	216	217	218
224	226	227	228	229	230	231
236	237	238	239	240	241	242

How much do you earn in a week?	What this money is used for?	How much money is used for personal use in a week?	Work place	Age when started this particular work
207	208	209	210	211
219	220	221	222	223
232	233	234	235	236
243	244	245	246	247

C. Section: Views regarding children

[1]Later changed to January 1st as the cut-off date.

300 How many children do you have?
301 Are you satisfied with that number of children? yes→311; no→
If not, why do you think that you are not satisfied? Give two important reasons.
302 .....
303 .....
How many more children do you want?
304 Total
305 Male children
306 Female children
Why do you want less than this many children? Give two important reasons
307 .....
308 .....
Why do you feel more than these number of children is not needed? Give two important reasons.
309 .....
310 .....
Why do you feel that this number of children is sufficient? Give two important reasons.
311 .....
312 .....
313 In your opinion are sons essential for a couple? yes→316; no→continue
Why do you think sons are not essential to a couple?
314 .....
315 .....
Why do you think sons are essential to a couple?
316 .....
317 .....
318 In your opinion are daughters essential to a couple? yes→continue; no→ 321
Why do you think so? Give two important reasons
319 .....
320 .....
Why do you think daughters are not essential to a couple? Give two important reasons.
321 .....
322 .....
In your opinion how many children should one couple have?
323 Total
324 Male children
325 Female children
In your opinion if a couple has two or more sons, what are the advantages to parents? Give two advantages.
326 .....
327 .....
In your opinion if a couple has two or more sons, what are the disadvantages? Give two disadvantages.
328 .....
329-330 .....

In your opinion, if a couple has two or more daughters, what are the advantages to parents? Give two advantages.
331 .....
332 .....
In your opinion, if a couple has two or more daughters, what are the disadvantages to parents? Give two important reasons.
333.....
334-335.....
In your opinion, if a couple has one son, what are the advantages to parents? Give two important reasons.
336.....
337 .....
In your opinion, if a couple has one son, what are the disadvantages? Give two important reasons.
338.....
339-340.....
In your opinion, if a couple has one daughter, what are the advantages to parents? Give two important reasons.
341.....
342 .....
In your opinion, if a couple has one daughter, what are the disadvantages to parents? Give two important reasons.
343.....
344-345.....

D. Section: Old-age-related issues

400 In your opinion up to what age should one work?
401 Up to what age will you work?
What are the precautions you have taken to deal with old age? Give two precautions.
402 .....
403 .....
404 Will your sons provide economic assistance in your old age?
Why will they help? Why will they not help?
405 .....
406 .....
407 On whom will you depend in old age?
408 Will you expect economic assistance from your daughters?
409 Do you expect at least one son to help you in old age?
410 Do you think that you will require economic assistance from your children?
411 Do you think your children will be economically capable of helping you in old ag
Why do you think they will have the ability?
Why do you think they will not have the ability? Give two important reasons.
412 .....
413 .....
414 Do you expect the old-age pension from the government?
Why do you think that you will get the pension? Give two important reasons.
415 .....
416 .....
Why do you think that you will not get the pension? Give two important reasons.
417 .....
418 .....

E. Section: Benefits from children

500 In your opinion is there any change in the benefits from sons compared to the past' What are those changes? Give two important changes.

501 .....

502 .....

In your opinion why did such changes occur? Give two important reasons.

503 .....

504 .....

505 In your opinion is there any change in the benefits from daughters compared to the past? yes→continue; no→515

What are those changes? Give two important changes.

506 .....

507 .....

In your opinion why did such changes occur? Give two important reasons.

508 .....

509 .....

510 Do you want your children to continue your occupation? yes→continue; no→513

Why do you wish so? Give two important reasons.

511 .....

512 .....

Why do you not wish so? Give two important reasons.

513 .....

514 .....

F. Section: Fertility-related issues

600 How many children on average do people from your community in this village have?

In your opinion why do they have no more than this? Give two important reasons.

601 .....

602 .....

603 Which community has the highest number of children in your locality?

In your opinion why do they have that many children? Give two important reasons.

604 .....

605 .....

606 In your opinion which community has the lowest number of children in your locality?

In your opinion why do they have that many children only? Give two important reason

607 .....

608 .....

G. Section: Cost of living

700 Would you be able to meet all the expenses of your family from your and your wife's/husband's

wage/salary? yes→705; no→continue

If not, why? Give two important reasons.

701 .....

702 .....

How do you manage the expenses of your family? Give two important sources.

703 .....

704 .....

What is the benefit of this work timing? Give two important reasons.
706 .....
707 .....
708 Could you save anything from your wage/salary? yes→??; no→??
709 How much do you save in a month?
Why do you save? Give two important reasons.
710 .....
711 .....
712 How do you save?

H. Section: Living arrangements

800 Do you plan to have a separate house? yes→; no→802
801 When do you plan to do so?
If not, give two important reasons
802 .....
803 .....

J. Section: Fertility History

900 Age at marriage				
Name of child	Age	Sex	Alive/dead	Age at death
901	902	903	904	905
906	907	908	909	910
911	912	913	914	915
916	917	918	919	920
921	922	923	924	925
926	927	928	929	930
931	932	933	934	935
936	937	938	939	940
941	942	943	944	945
946	947	948	949	950

J. Section: Family planning

1000 Have you or your husband ever used a modern family planning method?
yes→continue; no→Reasons for non-use
1001 Name of the method
1002 Are you currently using any family planning method? yes→; no→
1003 Name of the method
Reasons for non-use
1004 .....
1005 .....
1006 At what age did you use family planning for the first time?
1007 How many children did you have at that time?
1008 Do you plan to use any family planning method in future? yes→; no→
1009 Which method are you planning to use?
1010 When do you plan to use it?
Why do you plan to use this method? Give two important reasons.
1011 .....
1012 .....
1013 Record time now
1014 Any other comments about this interview

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4. Elderly Vettuvan Survey, 1997

A. Section: Identification

001 Schedule number:
002 Household schedule number, and address:
003 Husband's/wife's schedule number:
004 Date of interview:
005 Name of interviewer:
006 Now enter the time from your watch:

B. Section: Demographic characteristics

100 Name and sex of respondent:
101 Completed age as on Vishu (14 April):
102 Completed education:
103 Marital status:
104 Whether or not husband/wife is alive

C Section

Important work Being done	hours in a day	days in a week	months in a year	wage in a day
200	201	202	203	204
205	206	207	208	209
210	211	212	213	214

D. Section

Give two main kinds of work that you were doing when you were around 40 years of age?
300 .....
301 .....
If not doing any paid work, ask the following
Why did you stop working? Give two important reasons:
302 .....
303 .....
304 When did you stop working?
305 Has your economic position improved compared to the past?
Why do you think so? Give two reasons:
306 .....
307.....

E. Section

400 How many of your sons are alive?
401 How many of your daughters are alive?
402 How many of your married sons are alive?
403 How many of your married sons live in Enagandiyour village?
404 How many of your married sons live with you in this house?
405 How many of your unmarried sons live with you in this house?
406 How many of your sons live outside the village?
407 How many of your married daughters are alive?
408 How many of your married daughters live with you in this house?
409 How many of your unmarried daughters live with you in this house?
410 How many of your unmarried daughters live outside the village?

F. Section

What are the benefits you receive from your married sons? Give two important benefits.
500 .....
501 .....
What benefits do you get from unmarried sons? Give two important benefits.
502 .....
503 .....
What benefits do you get from your married daughters? Give two important benefits.
504 .....
505 .....
What benefits do you get from your unmarried daughters? Give two important benefits.
506 .....
507 .....
508 Who takes care of you when you are sick?
509 Who pays your medical bills?

G. Section

600 Is the help you receive from your children better than the help that you provided to your parents?
1. Better
2. Worse
3. Same

601 Are educated children more useful than uneducated children for helping parents in old age?
1. Educated
2. Uneducated

602 In your opinion who assist parents more in their old age: married sons or unmarried sons?
1. Married
2. Unmarried

603 In your opinion who assist parents more in their old age: married daughters or unmarried daughters?
1. Married
2. Unmarried

H. Section	For women only		
700-715	Names of children	alive/not	age at death

The Australian National University

5. School-Going Children Survey, 1997

A. Section

001 Number of this interview schedule:
002 Schedule number of household schedule and address:
003 Schedule number of couple schedule (husband):
004 Schedule number of couple schedule (wife):
005 Name of interviewer:
006 Date of interview:
007 Record time now:

B. Section

008 Name of respondent:
009 Relationship with child:
100 Name and sex of child:
101 Age of child (on 14 April):
102 Standard in which the child is studying:
103 School in which the child is studying:
104 Distance to the school from home:
105 Do you pay fees for the child?
106 Fee for a year:
107 How does the child go to school?
108 Transport cost for one year for the child to go to the school:
109 How much money do you spend on this child in one year for clothing, shoes, and other expenses (excluding food)?
110 Do you have to pay any other fees in the school?
111 Such fees for one year:
112 Total expenses for this child (excluding food):

C. Section

200 Why do you educate this child? Give two important reasons.
201 Up to what level will you educate this child? Why? Give two important reasons.
202 What are the problems that you and your family have to face because of sending this child to school? Give two important reasons.
203 Professionally what you want this child to become when he is grown up? Why do you wish so? Give two important reasons.
204 Did this child ever work for money? yes→1 ; no→2 go to question 217
205 Does he/he still work for money? yes→1; no→2
206 Give details for work that the child did/is doing:
207 On which days does the child go to work?
208 Wage from one day's work:
209 To whom does the child give his/her wage?
210 Does this child help in any work at home? yes→1; no→2
211 What help?
212 When did this child stop helping with home activities?
213 Why did the child stop helping at home?
214 Record time now:

Appexdix-2

Data quality tables

Appendix 2.1: Single year age distribution of the household population by age and sex, household survey, 1997

Age	Male		Female		Age	Males		Female	
	No	%	No	%		No	%	No	%
1	25	1.3	28	1.5	36	12	0.6	9	0.5
2	17	0.9	10	0.5	37	7	0.4	15	0.8
3	17	0.9	16	0.9	38	18	1.0	23	1.2
4	9	0.5	18	1.0	39	8	0.4	11	0.6
5	16	0.9	13	6.0	40	21	1.1	21	1.1
6	14	0.7	14	0.7	41	5	0.3	4	0.2
7	11	0.6	14	0.7	42	17	0.9	13	0.7
8	9	0.5	14	0.7	43	6	0.3	7	0.4
9	12	0.6	10	0.5	44	7	0.4	7	0.4
10	23	1.2	11	0.6	45	23	1.2	18	1.0
11	18	1.0	11	0.6	46	11	0.6	9	0.5
12	14	0.7	18	1.0	47	10	0.5	5	0.3
13	19	1.0	13	0.7	48	14	0.7	8	0.4
14	35	1.9	10	0.5	49	7	0.4	5	0.3
15	17	0.9	23	1.2	50	13	0.7	19	1.0
16	18	1.0	19	1.0	51	3	0.2	5	0.3
17	15	0.8	11	0.6	52	10	0.5	12	0.6
18	18	1.0	31	1.7	53	1	0.1	1	0.1
19	18	1.0	20	1.1	54	4	0.2	4	0.2
20	22	1.2	34	1.8	55	16	0.9	17	0.9
21	18	1.0	24	1.3	56	6	0.3	4	0.2
22	17	0.9	25	1.3	57	6	0.3	2	0.1
23	23	1.2	29	1.5	58	3	0.2	6	0.3
24	18	1.0	25	1.3	59	4	0.2	2	0.1
25	23	1.2	27	1.4	60	14	0.7	17	0.9
26	20	1.1	23	1.2	61	4	0.2	0	-
27	18	1.0	15	0.8	62	6	0.3	8	0.4
28	24	1.3	19	1.0	63	-	-	-	-
29	16	0.8	17	0.9	64	2	0.1	4	0.2
30	30	1.6	24	1.3	65	10	0.5	21	1.1
31	12	0.6	5	0.3	66	1	0.1	3	0.2
32	14	0.7	15	0.8	67	1	0.1	2	0.1
33	20	1.1	8	0.4	68	3	0.2	4	0.2
34	13	0.7	5	0.3	69	2	0.1	1	0.1
35	27	1.4	21	1.1	70	26	1.4	33	1.8

Appendix 2.1: Age distribution of currently married and interviewed women, Vettuvan Survey, 1997

Age	Currently married women	Interviewed women	per cent interviewed
15-19	9	4	44.5
20-24	68	59	86.8
25-29	79	65	82.3
30-34	45	45	100.0
35-39	71	60	84.1
40-44	41	40	97.6
45-49	38	35	92.1
All	351	308	87.7

Appendix-3

Scheduled castes in Kerala, 1981

Sl. no	Name	Sl.no	Name
1	Adi Andhra	35	Malia
2	Adi Dravida	36	Malayan
3	Adi Karnataka	37	Mannan
4	Ajila	38	Mavilan
5	Arunthathiyar	39	Moger
6	Ayyanavar	40	Mundala
7	Baira	41	Nalakeyava
8	Bakuda	42	Nalkadaya
9	Bandi	43	Nayadi
10	Bathada	44	Padannan
11	Bellara	45	Pallan
12	Bharatar	46	Palluvan
13	Boyan	47	Pambada
14	Chakkiliyan	48	Panan
15	Chamar, Muchi	49	Panchama
16	Chandala	50	Pariyan, Parayan, Sambavan
17	Cheruman	51	Paravan
18	Domban	52	Pathiyan
19	Govara	53	Perumannan
20	Godagali	54	Pulayan, Cheruman
21	Godda	55	Pulaya Vettuvan
22	Gosangi	56	Puthiri Vannan
23	Hasla	57	Raneyar
24	Holeya	58	Samagara
25	Kadaliyan	59	Samban
26	Kakkalan	60	Semman
27	Kalladi	61	Thandan
28	Kanakkan, Padanna	62	Thoti
39	Karimpalan	63	Vallon
30	Kavra	64	Valluvan
31	Koosa	65	Vannan
32	Kootan, Koodan	66	Velan
33	Kudumban	67	Vetan
34	Kuravan, sidhanar	68	Vettuvan

Note: This list is based on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendement) Act 1976.
Source: Director of Census Operations (1981)

Appendix-4

A note on terminology used in the thesis

Traditional caste system: This term is interchangalby used with caste system. It refers to stratification of Hindu society characterised by hierachy, heredity and pursuit of one or a few particular occupations, inequality, endgamy, restrictions to taking food from outsiders and the notion of purity and pollusion associated with hierarchy. The period from the eighteenth to mid-twentieth century is considered in the theis as the traditional caste sytem period.

Non-traditional caste sytem: The caste system that existed from the mid-twentieth century is refered in this thesis as non-traditional caste system. Those restrictions posed on the lower castes under the caste-sytem has been absnet in the non-traditional caste sytem.

Lower castes: Those castes which fall in the lowest levels of caste sytem of Hindu society. That is Ezavas and below.

Upper castes: Those castes which fall in the upper levels of the caste sytem of Hindu soceity. That is Nairs and above.

Scheduled castes: In this thesis the term scheduled castes refers to the scheduled castes listed by the Government of India after Independence (under Article 341) and the so-called untouchables or depressed castes who were not a part of the *chaturvarana* of the Hindu caste system. Therefore, the term scheduled caste in this thesis refers to both the pre-and post-Independent India, even though the term scheduled caste is used only in the context of post-Independent India.

Gulf migration: Migration of Keralans to the Middle East which began on a large scale in the 1970s.

Remitance based economy: The economy largely depend on remittance from the Gulf countries or other Indian state.

Land reform: The Kerala Land Reform (Amentment) Act of 1969 which came into to effect on 1 January 1970.

Appendix-5

Castes, their traditional and present occupations.

Name of caste	Traditional occupation	Present occupation
Namboodiri Nair	These communities were land owners of the village. They were treated as upper Caste.	Mostly government servants. White collar job holders in private sector.
Ezava Mukkuvan ValanAsari Kal-Kurup Kollan Panan	*Ezavans* are traditionally toddy tapers *Mukkuvans* and Valans are fishermen. They were untouchable to upper caste Hindus. *Asaries* are carpenters *Kal-Kurup* belong to the house construction caste. They were untouchables to upper caste Hindus Kollan were mainly leather workers Panans were musicians	Mostly migrants to Gulf, other states in India, business people and Government servants.
Vettuvan Parayan Mannan	*Vettuvans* are agriculture labourers. *Parayans* make kitchen appliances from bamboo. They are untouchables to upper caste Hindus. *Mannans* were washermen in the village.	Mostly skilled workers or labourers in the village. Very few in Government jobs.
Nayadi	Hunting community. They were untouchable to upper caste Hindus.	Labourers in the village

Note: The classification given denotes the social relations existed in this particular village only. And does not necessarily match with other classification of castes in Kerala or India.

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